

INDIAN
CLASSICS



KUMANAN

THE KING WHO LOVED POETRY

Vol 820 | ₹50

KUMANAN

Kumanan was the king of Mudiramalai, near modern-day Coimbatore, in Tamil Nadu. More inclined towards poetry than war, he was famed for his generosity and willingly gave his kingdom to his greedy brother, Ilankumanan.

Kumanan is thought to have ruled around the first century AD, during the Sangam age.

Our knowledge of Kumanan comes from a poetry collection of the time, the Purananoru.

In it, the Sangam poets, Peruchithiranaar and Peruthalaichattanaar, write of him with love and admiration. Kumanan encouraged and patronised all art forms. He was known to be a just and caring ruler.

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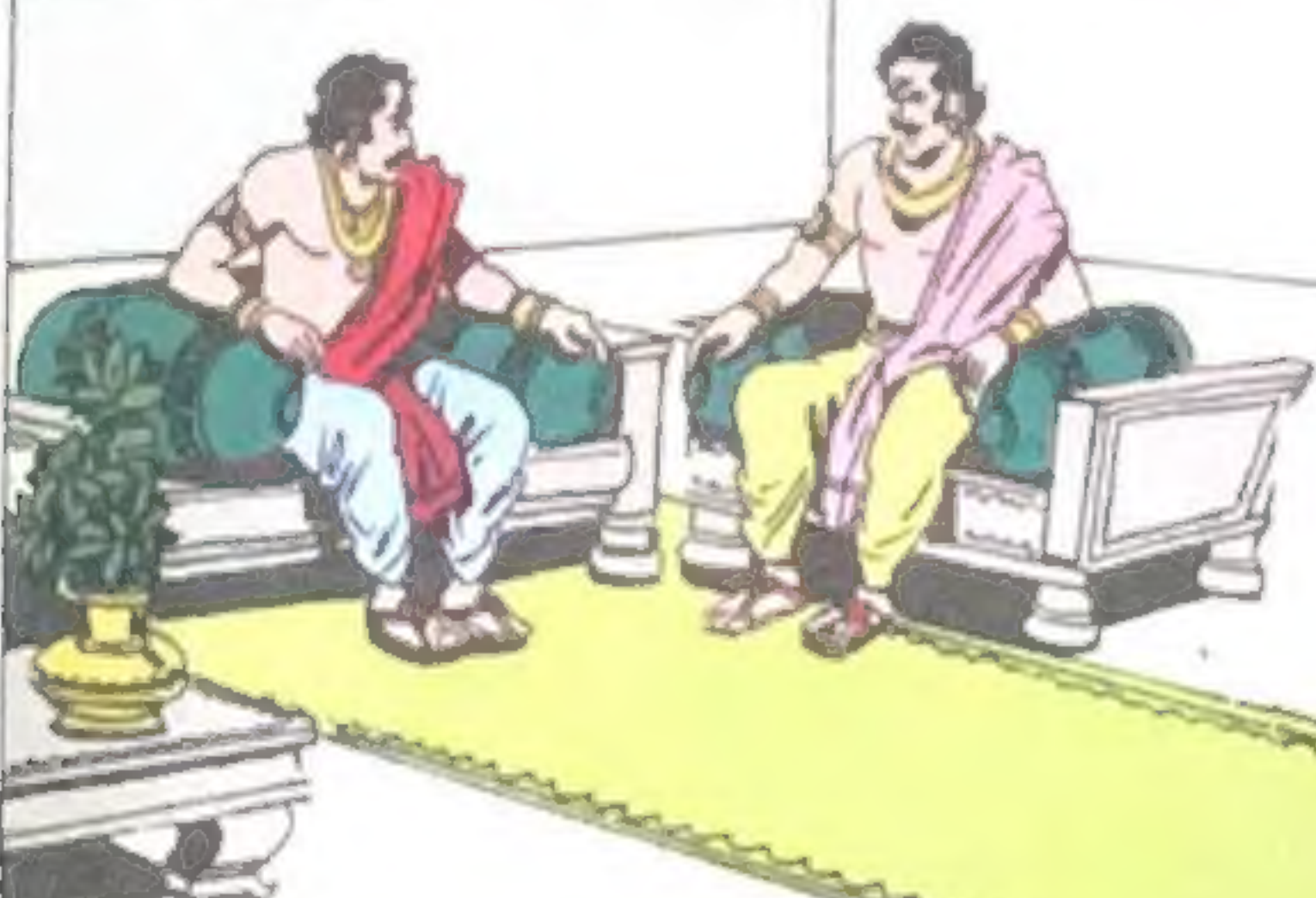
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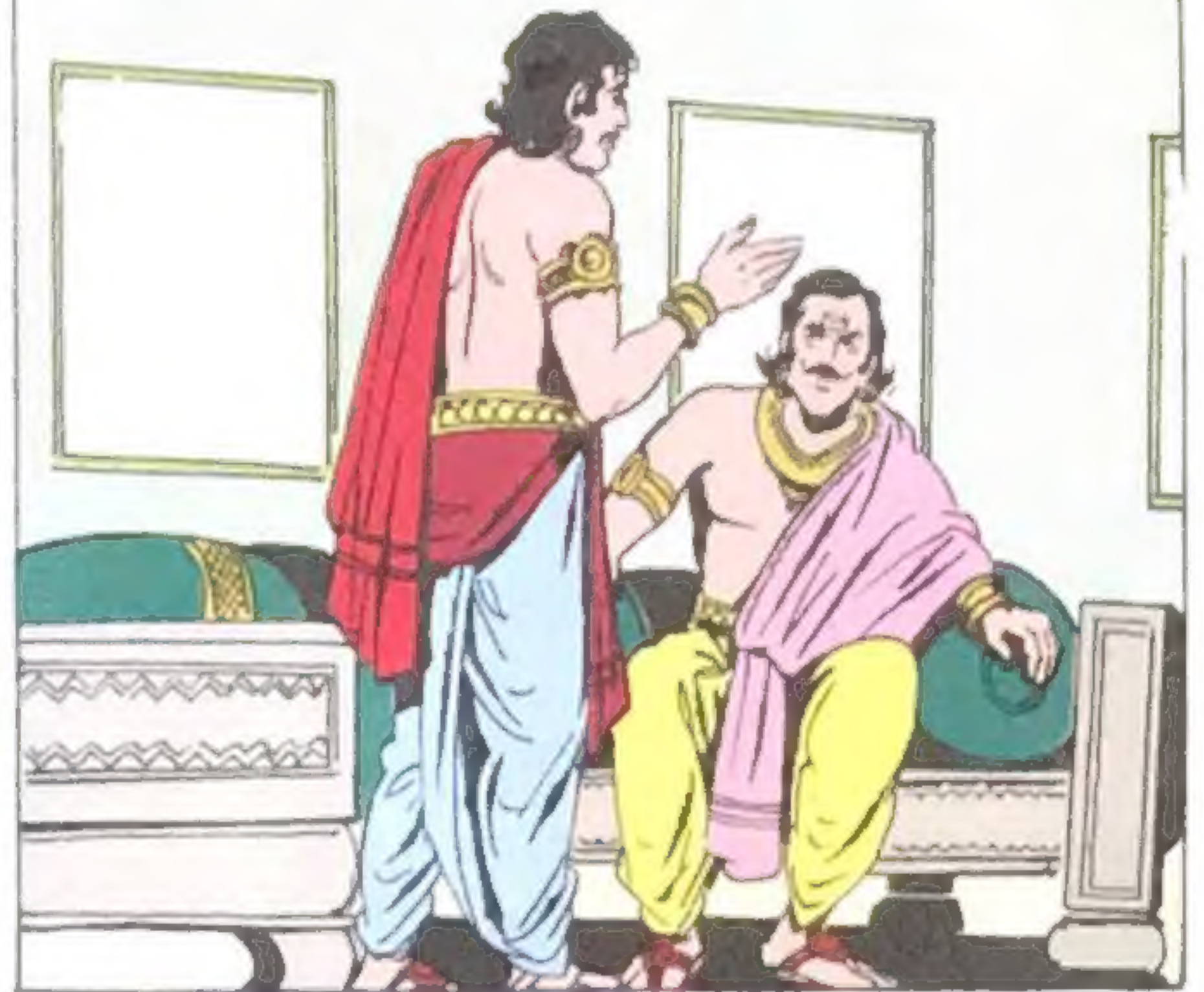


KUMANAN



KUMANAN, THE KING OF MUDIRAMALAI, AND HIS BROTHER, ILANKUMANAN, WERE DISCUSSING THE STATE-VISIT OF VELIMAN, A NEIGHBOURING KING.

HE SHOULD BE HERE ANY MOMENT. YOU WILL HAVE TO RECEIVE HIM AS I HAVE SOME URGENT WORK TO DO.



OUR LIBRARIAN HAS SECURED A RARE MANUSCRIPT. I WANT TO HAVE A LOOK AT IT.



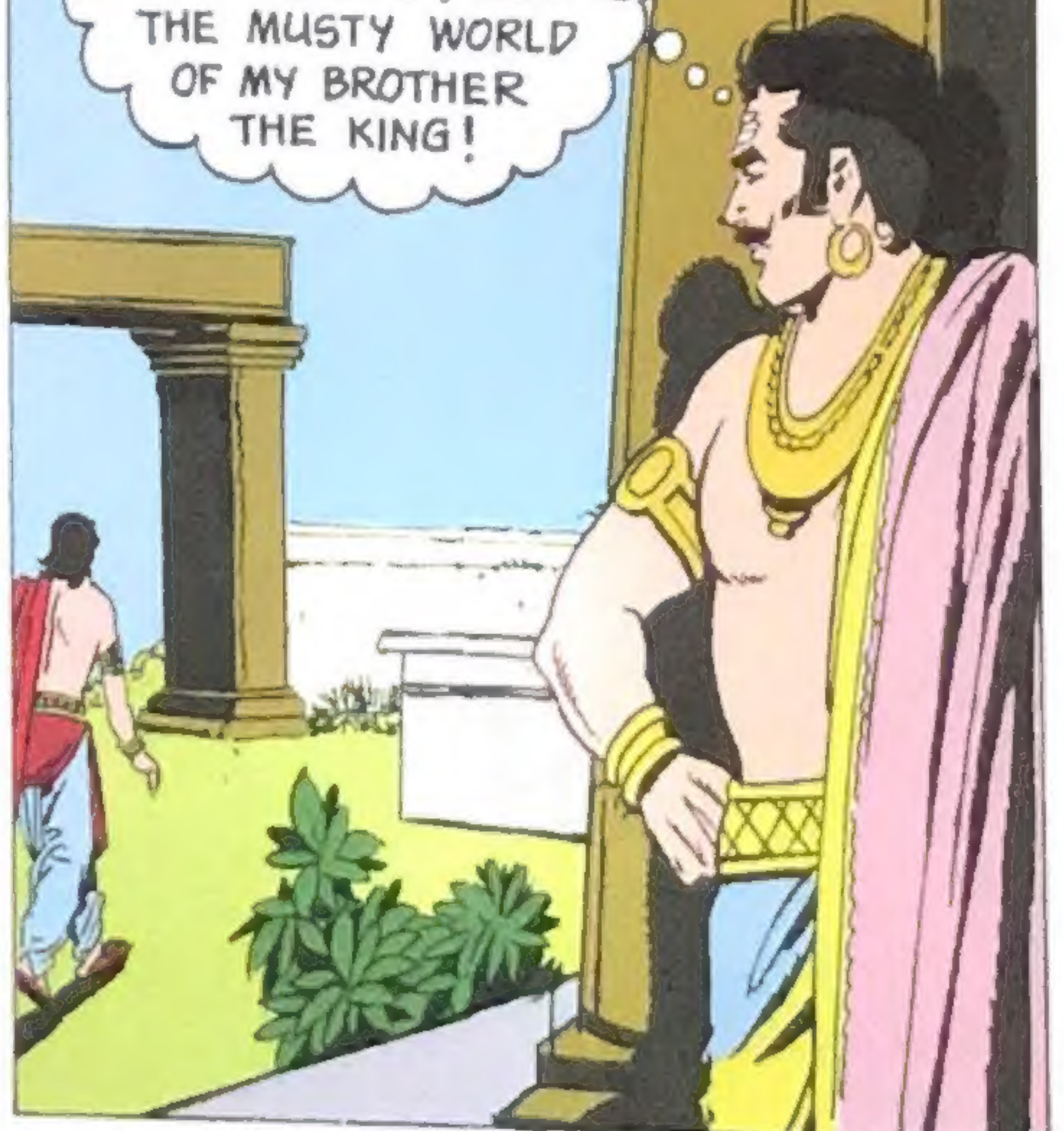
BUT, BROTHER, YOU SHOULD RECEIVE VELIMAN!



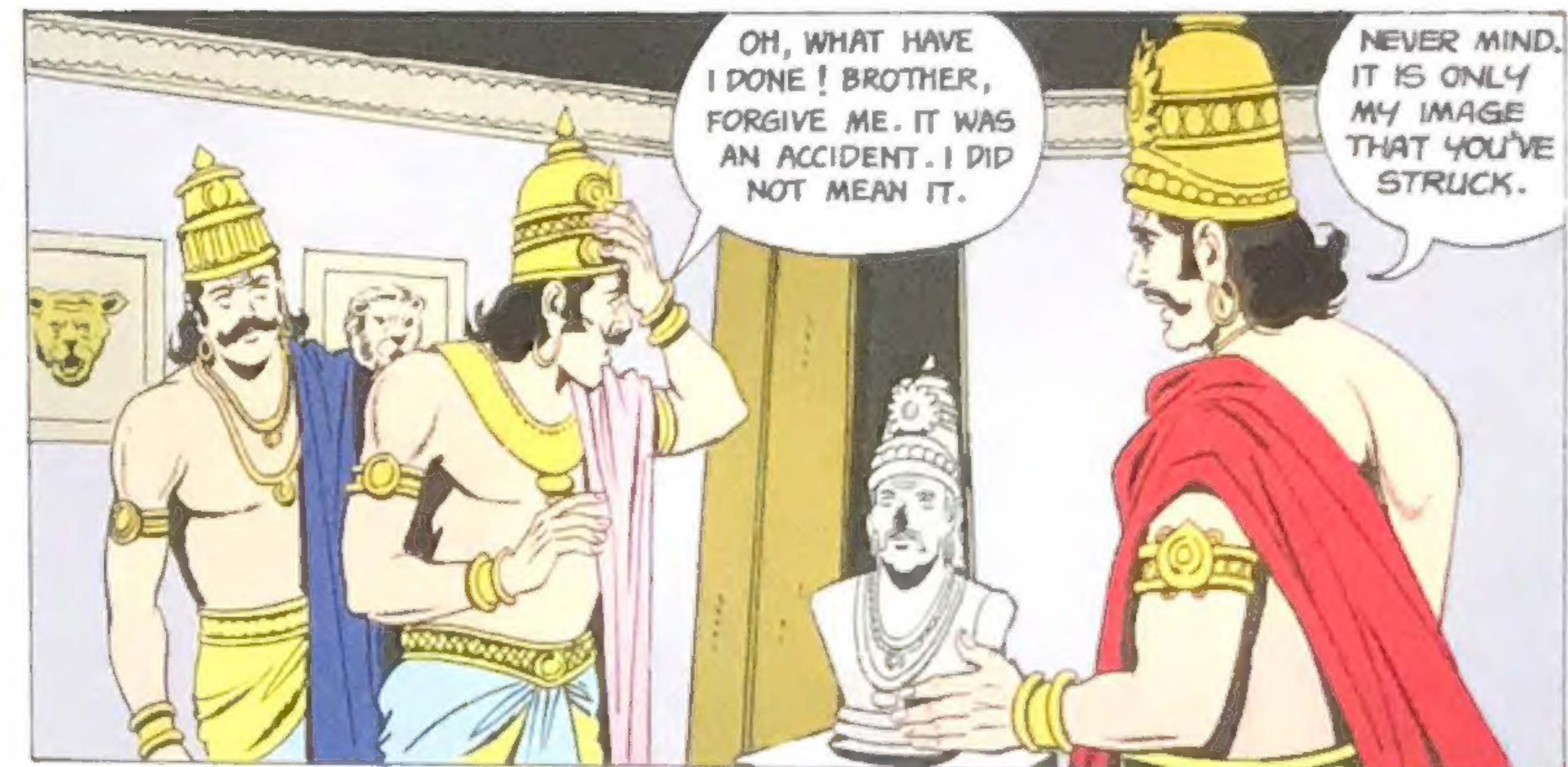
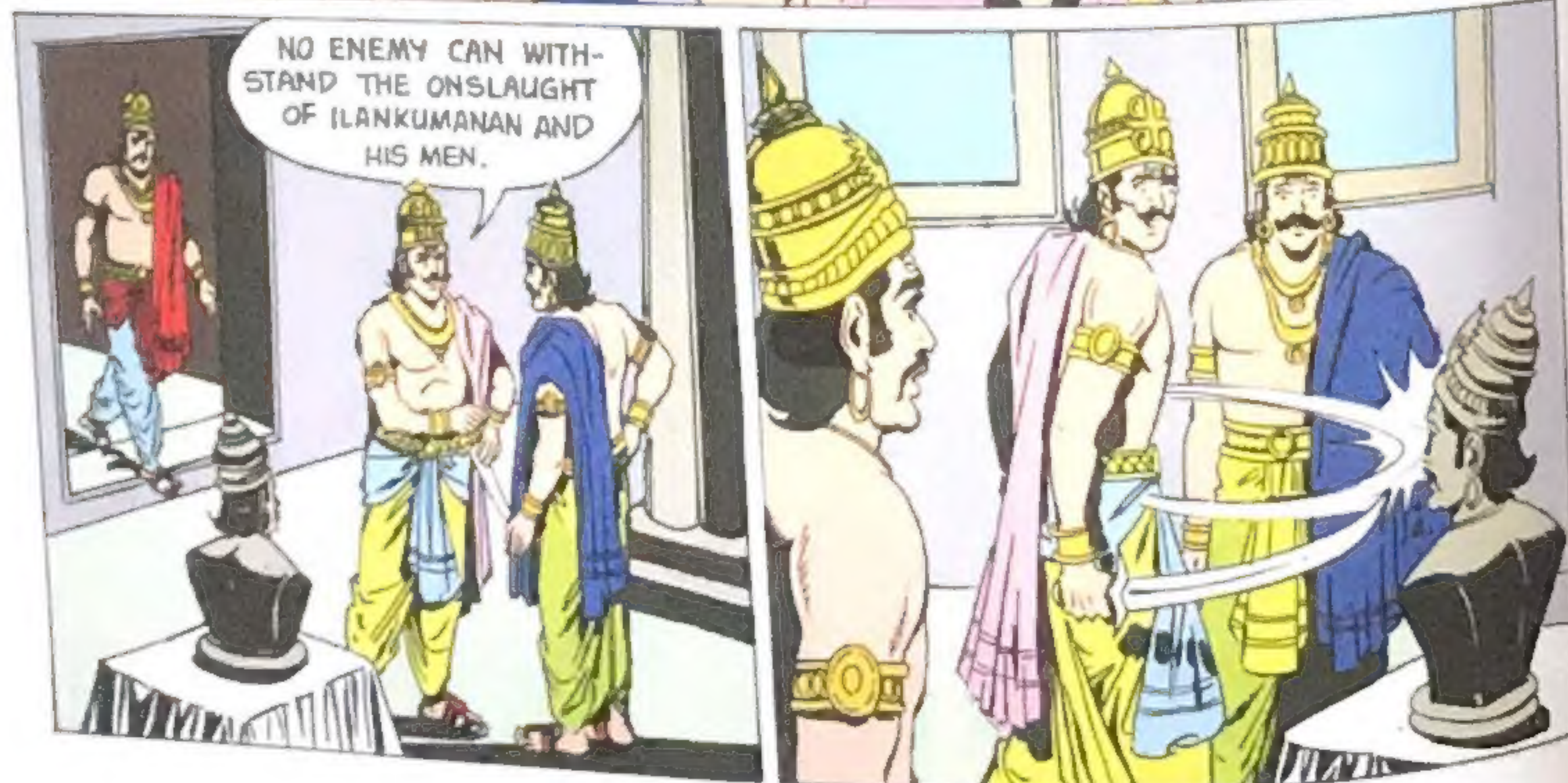
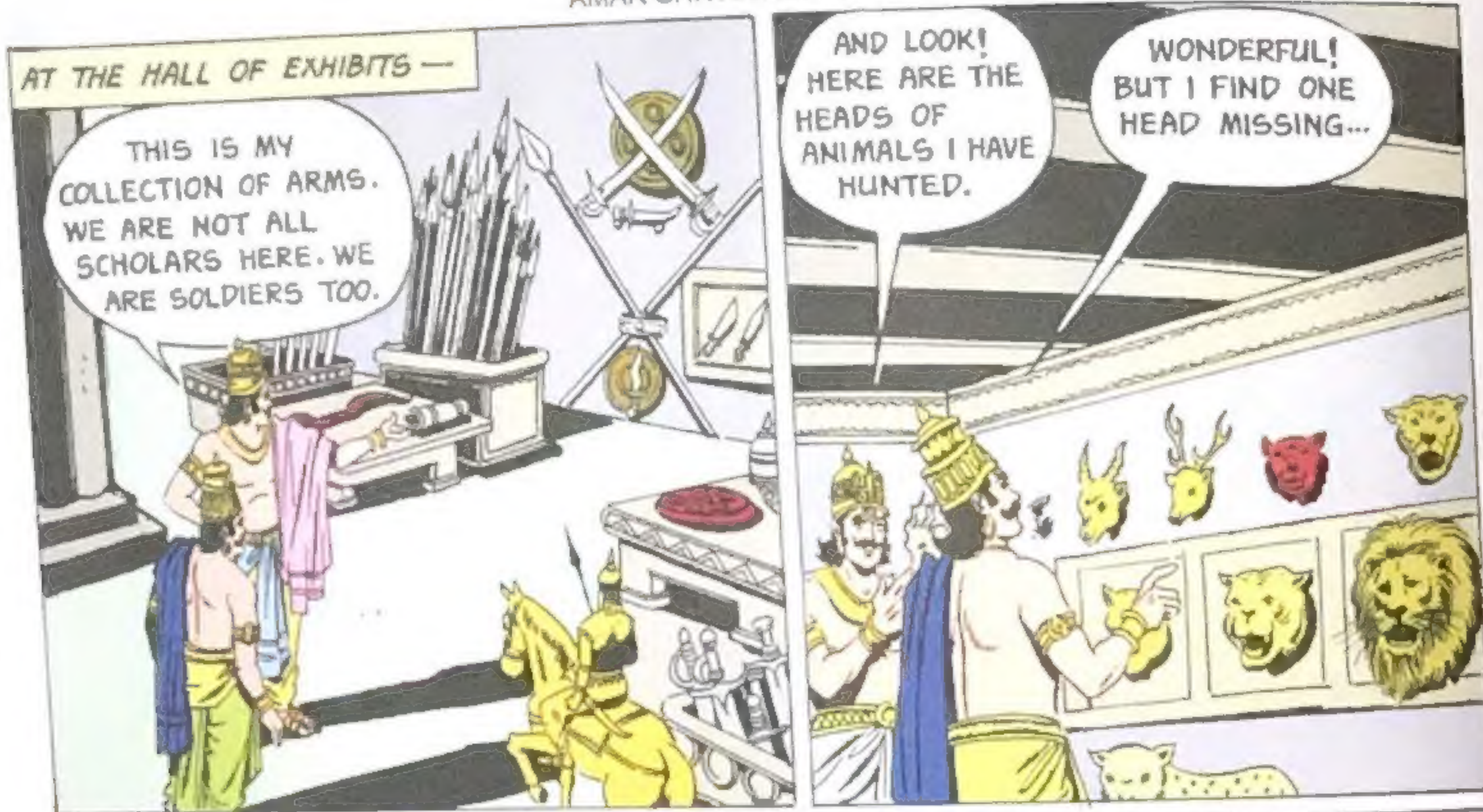
YOU DO IT ON MY BEHALF AND BRING HIM TO THE LIBRARY.



POETS! PARCHMENTS! PALM-LEAVES! THAT IS THE MUSTY WORLD OF MY BROTHER THE KING!







ON THE FOLLOWING DAY, ON THE OCCASION OF SARASWATI PUJA, THE WORSHIP OF THE GODDESS OF LEARNING, KUMANAN HELD A CONFERENCE OF POETS.



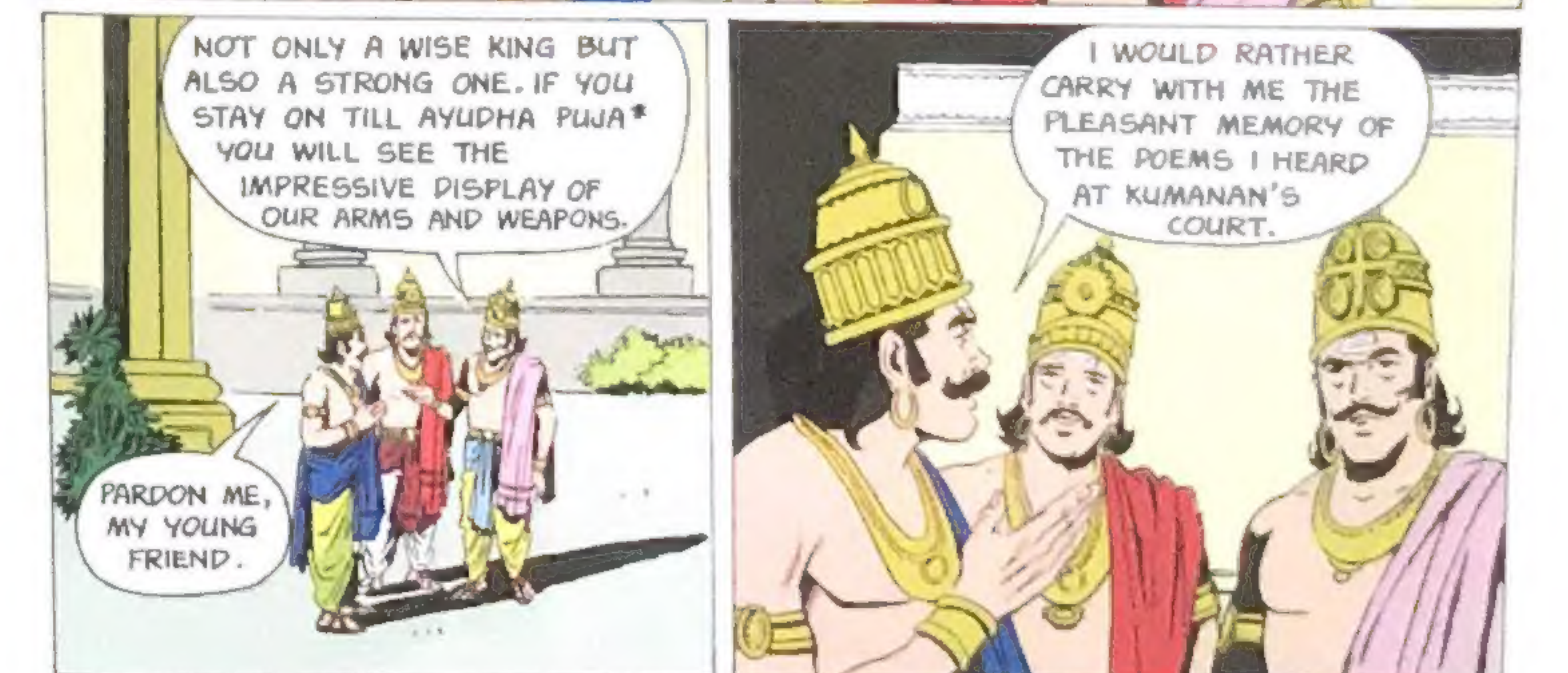
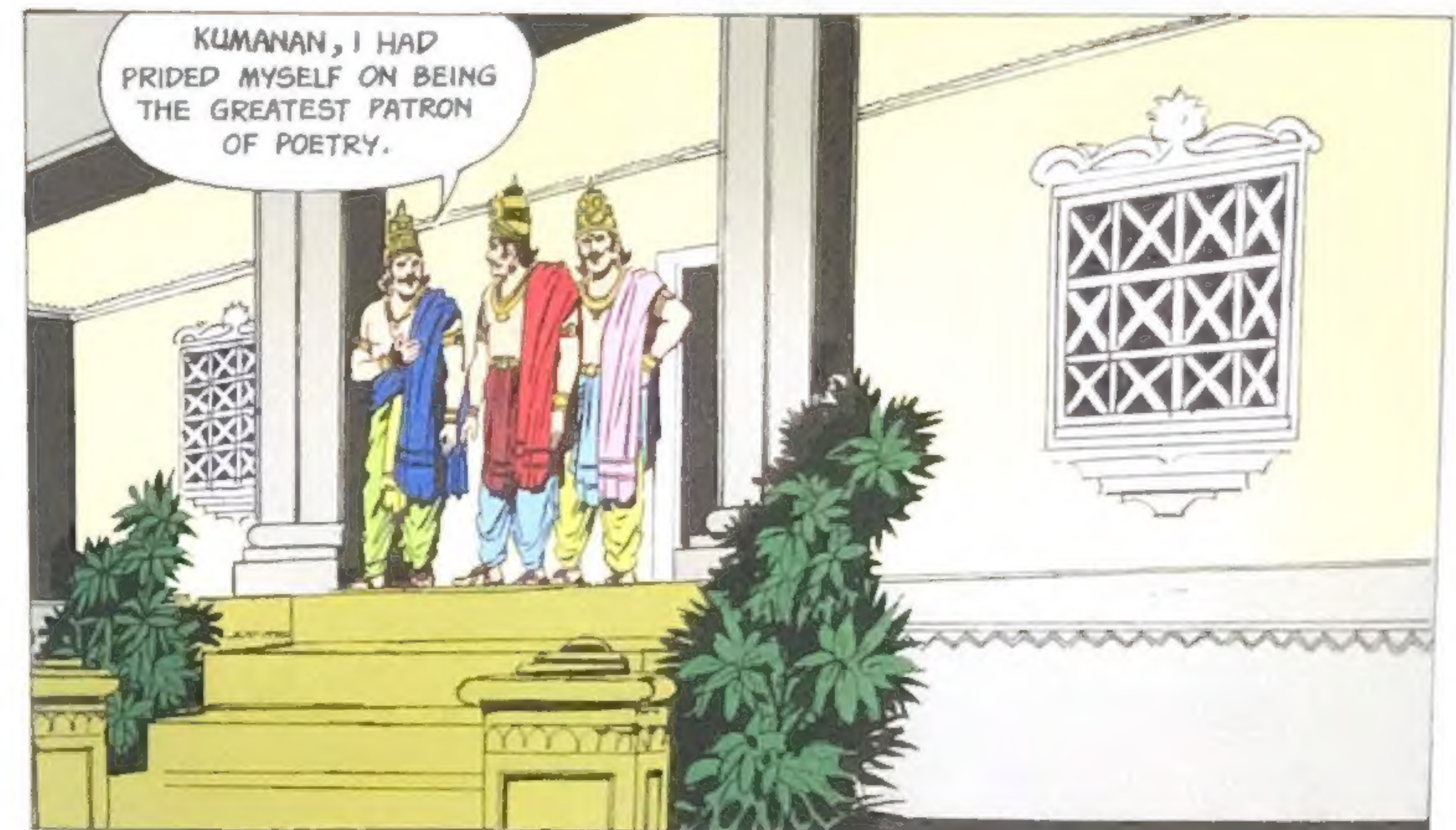
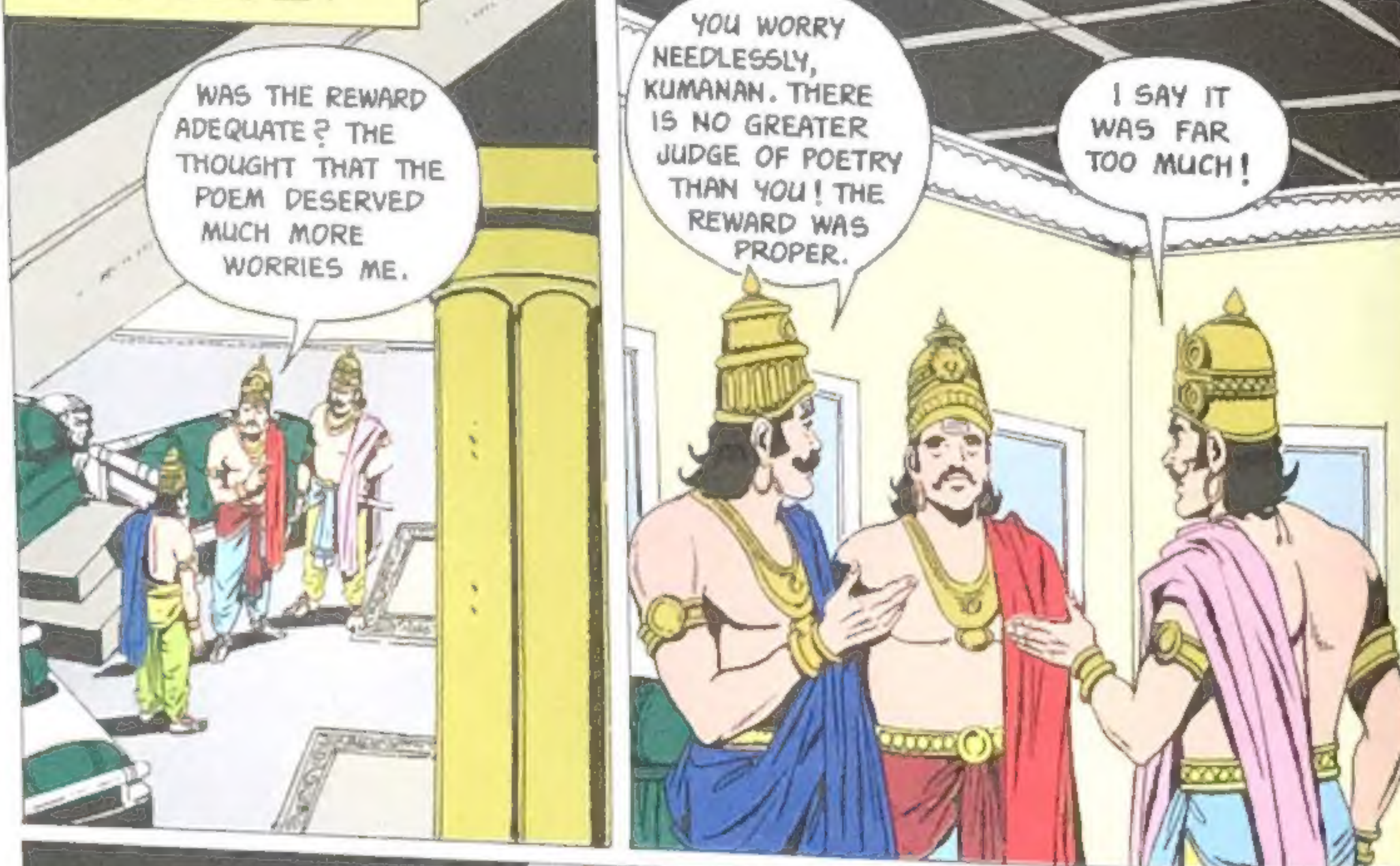
AS THE POET FINISHED HIS SONG, THE KING PRESENTED HIM WITH A BAG OF GOLD COINS.



CAN ANYTHING GIVE KEENER PLEASURE THAN POETRY, ILANKUMANAN?



AFTER THE POETS LEFT —



A FEW DAYS LATER KUMANAN HAD ANOTHER VISITOR, THE POET PERUNCHITTIRANAR.



WELCOME, SIR. THE KING IS BUSY, BUT HE WILL MEET YOU SOON.

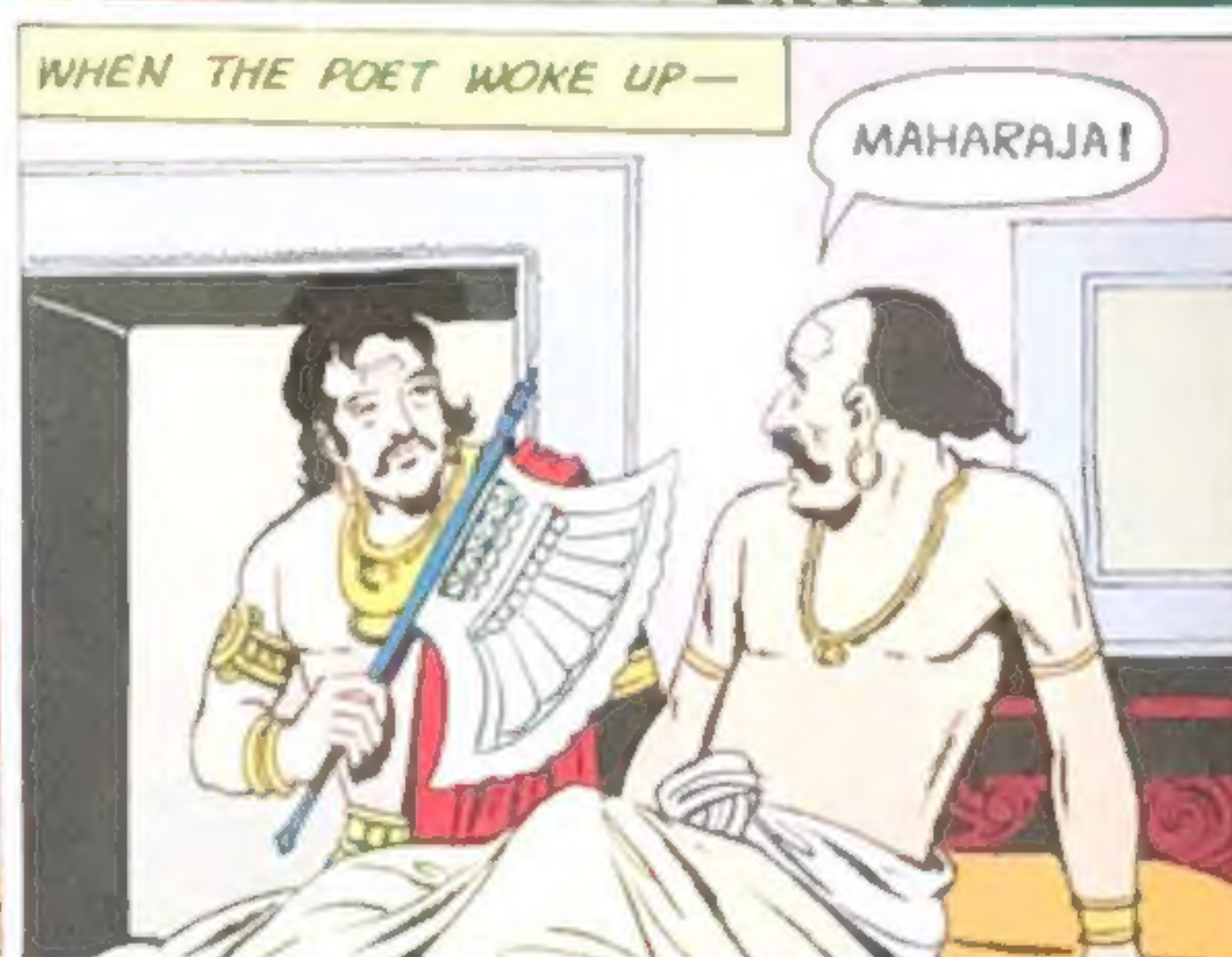
THE POET WAS TREATED LIKE A KING. AFTER A BATH AND A DELICIOUS MEAL THE POET LAY DOWN TO REST. HE WAS FAST ASLEEP WHEN KUMANAN CAME.



WHEN THE POET WOKE UP—



MAHARAJA!



MAHARAJA! PARDON ME FOR BEING ASLEEP WHEN YOU CAME IN!



I SHOULD APOLOGISE FOR NOT RECEIVING YOU WHEN YOU CAME.

THE KING SPENT MANY HAPPY DAYS IN THE POET'S COMPANY.

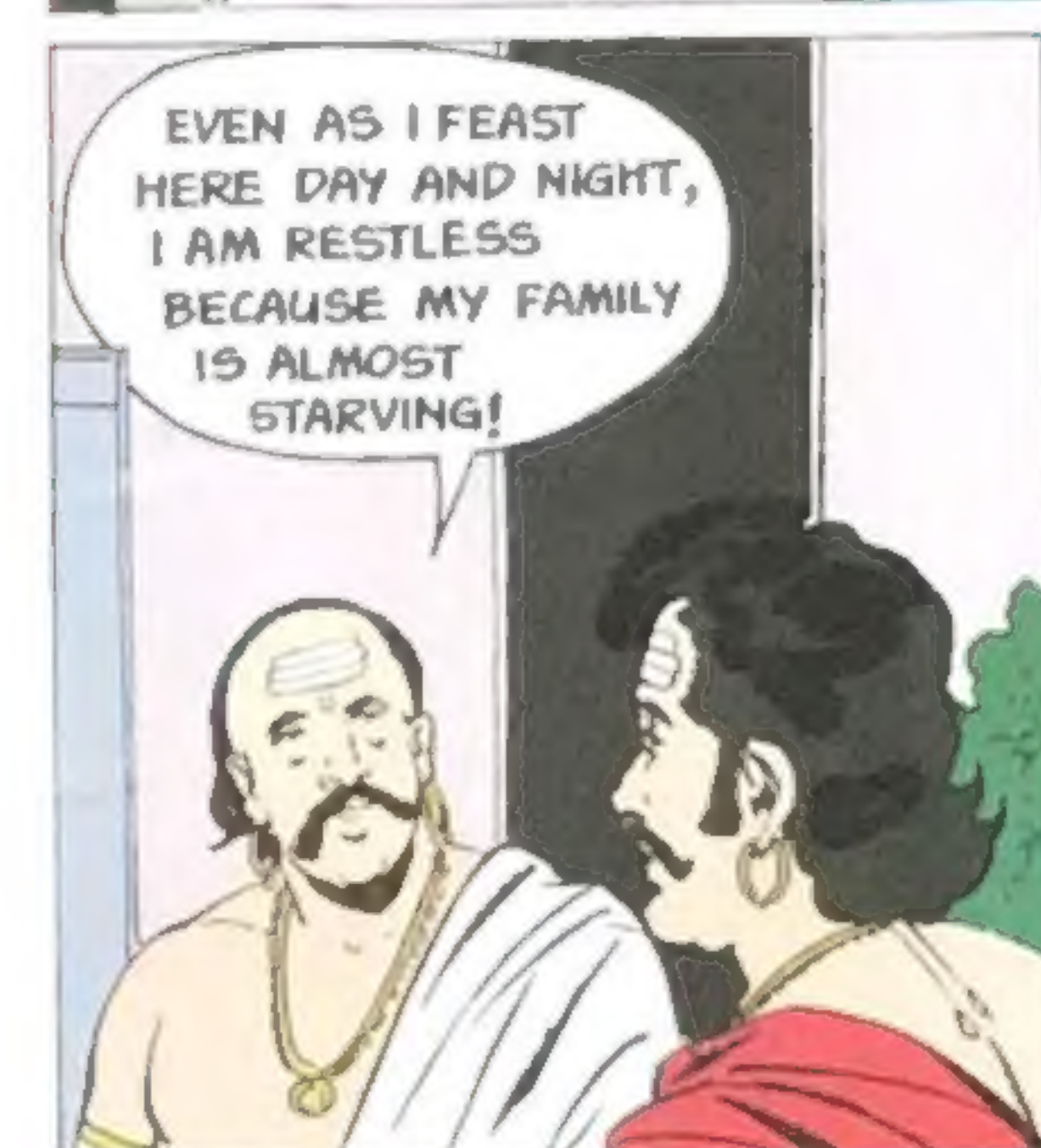


I MUST NOW RETURN HOME. I SEEK YOUR LEAVE.

DON'T TALK OF LEAVING SO SOON! AREN'T YOU HAPPY HERE?

HOW CAN ONE NOT BE HAPPY HERE? AND YET...

WHAT IS IT?

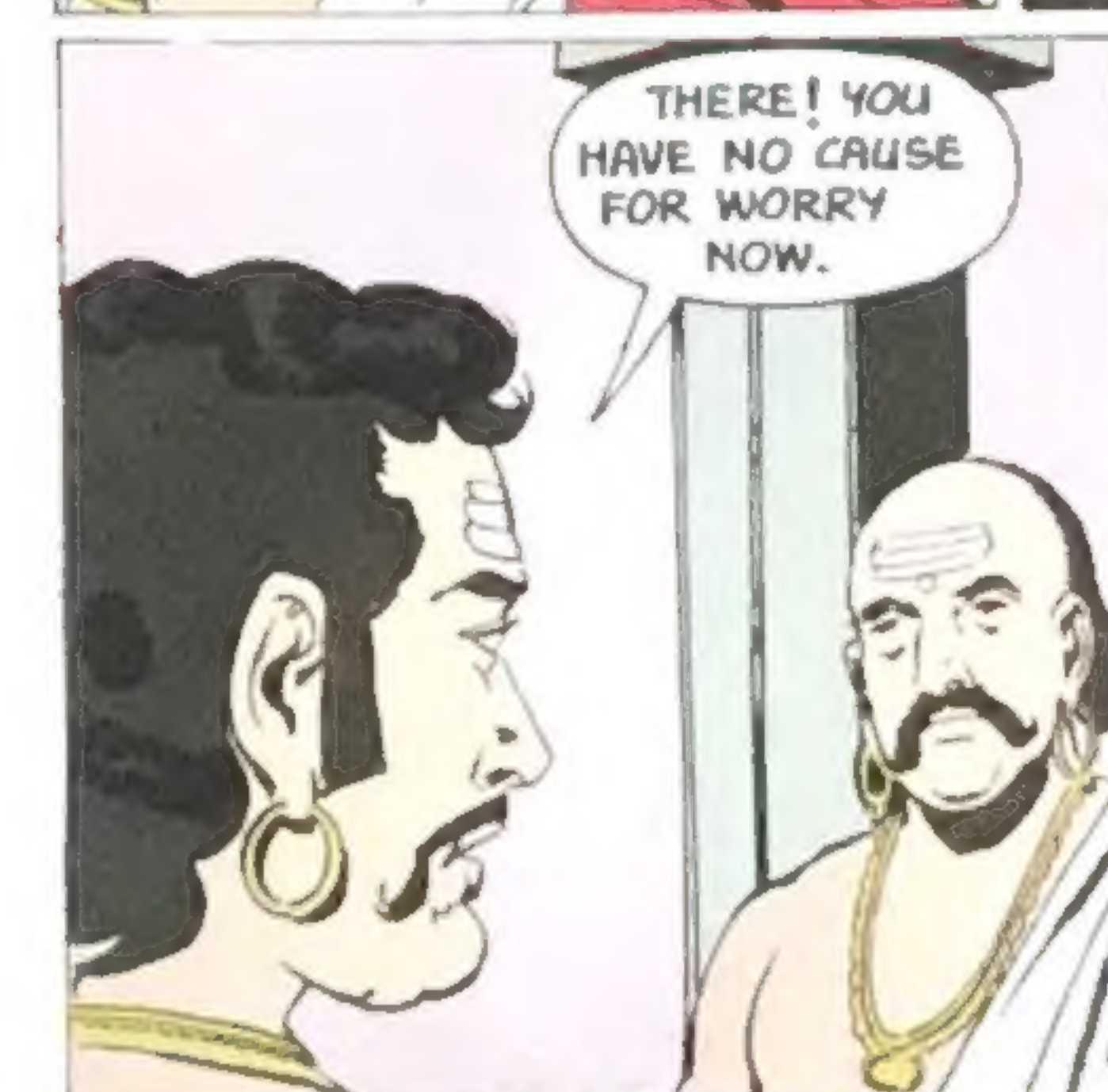


EVEN AS I FEAST HERE DAY AND NIGHT, I AM RESTLESS BECAUSE MY FAMILY IS ALMOST STARVING!

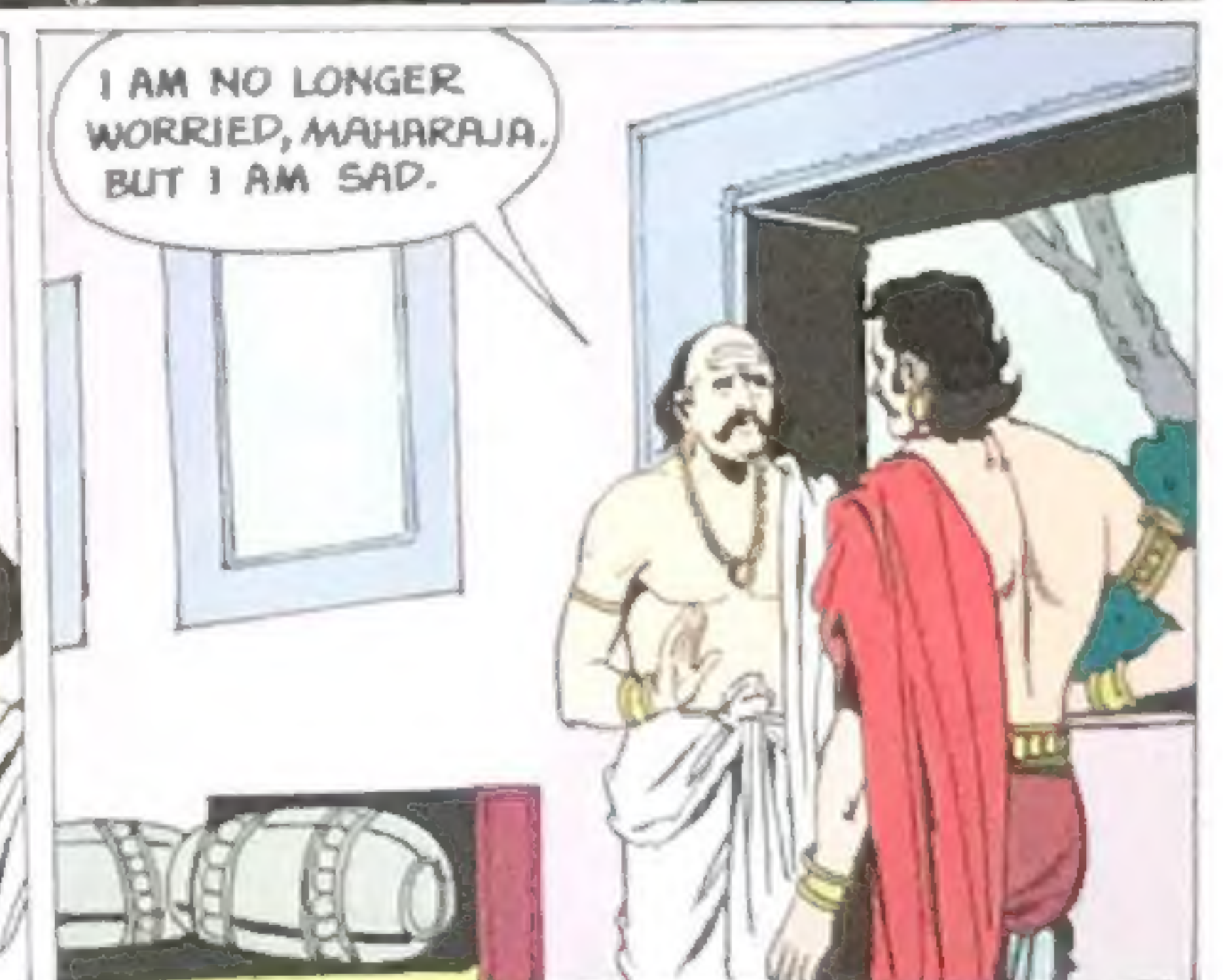


KUMANAN SENT FOR HIS MINISTER.

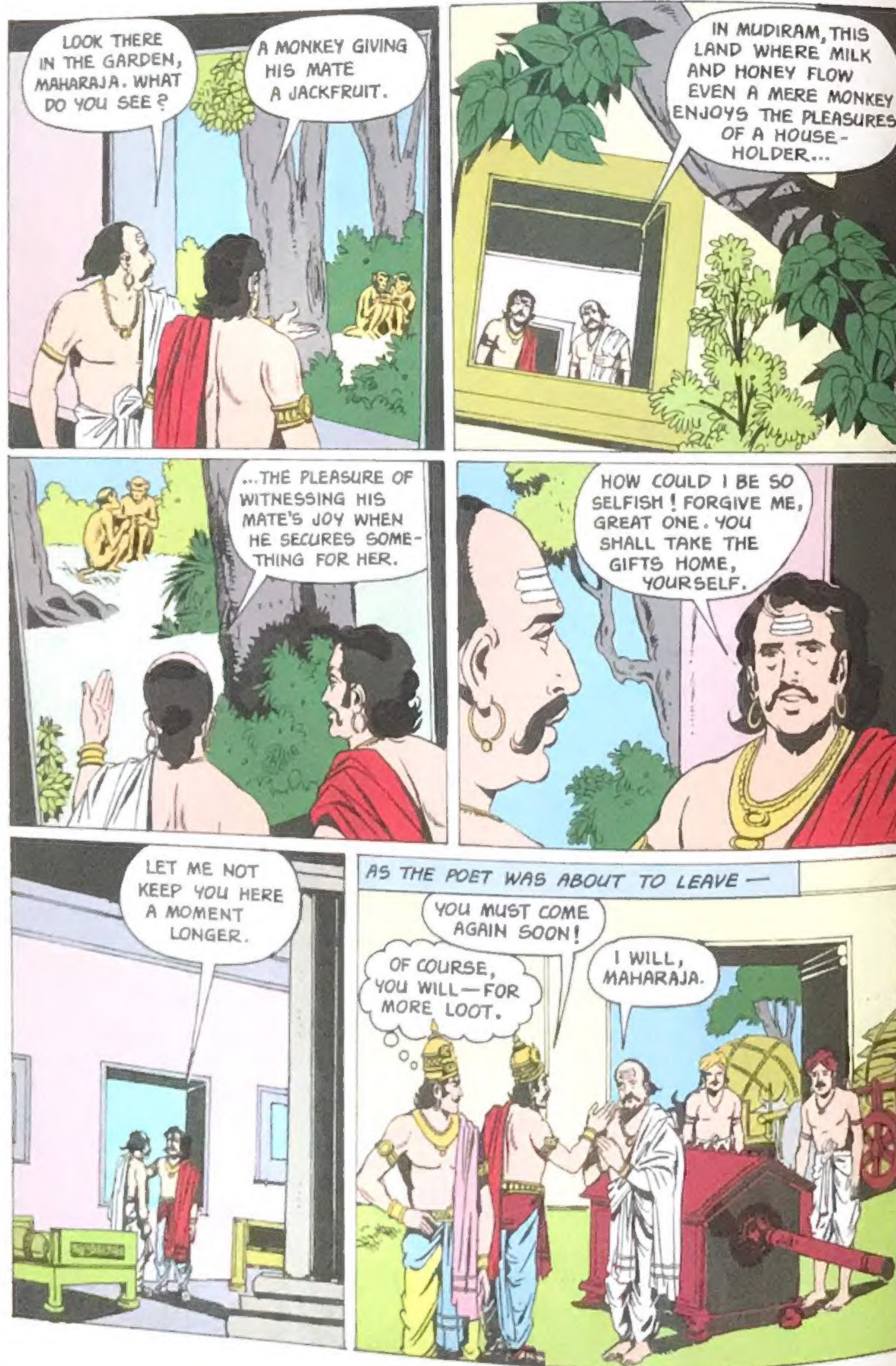
SEND THREE FULLY LADEN CARTS TO THE POET'S HOUSE! FOOD, CLOTHES AND ORNAMENTS, EVERYTHING THEY NEED SHOULD BE SENT!



THERE! YOU HAVE NO CAUSE FOR WORRY NOW.



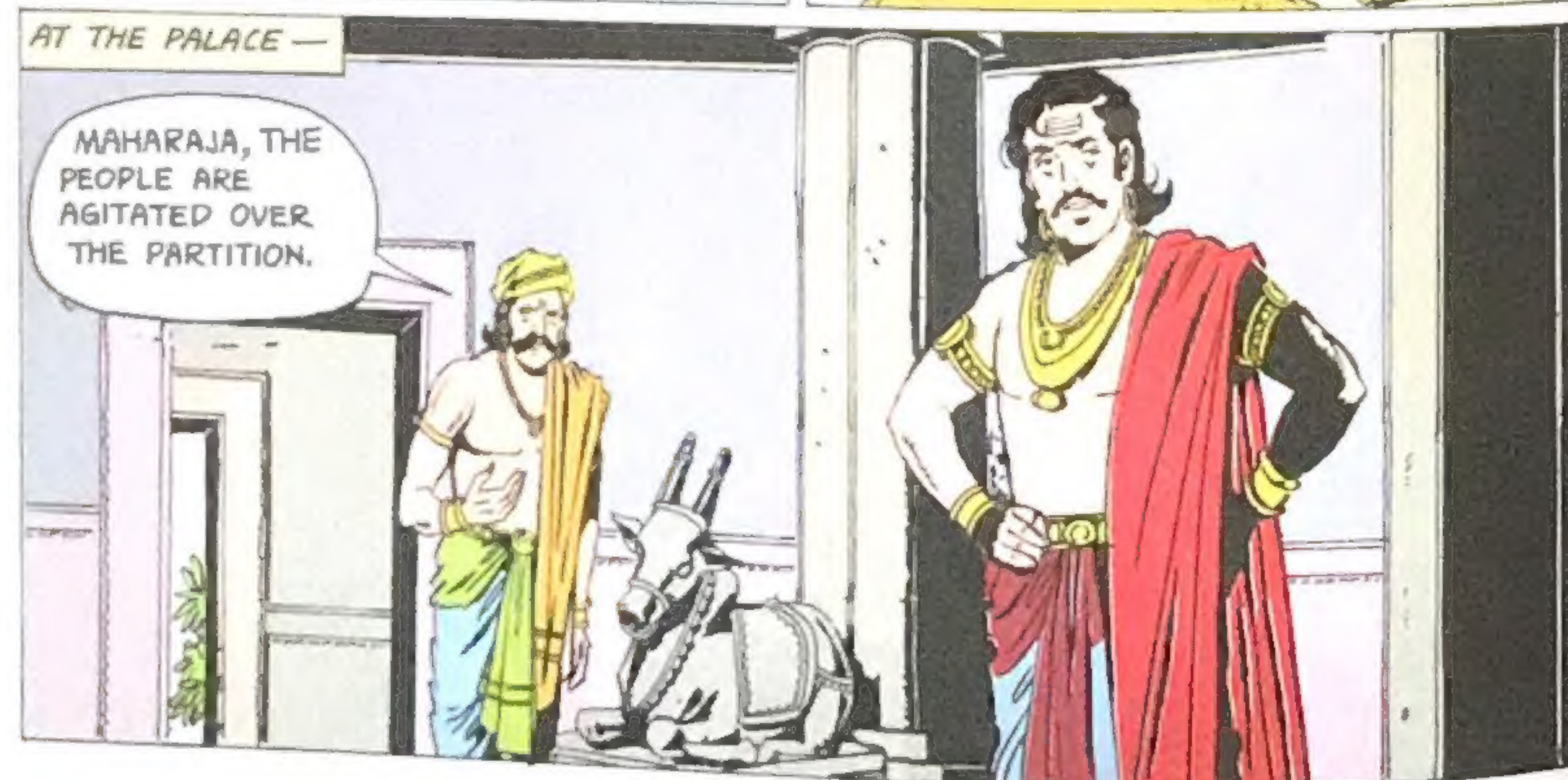
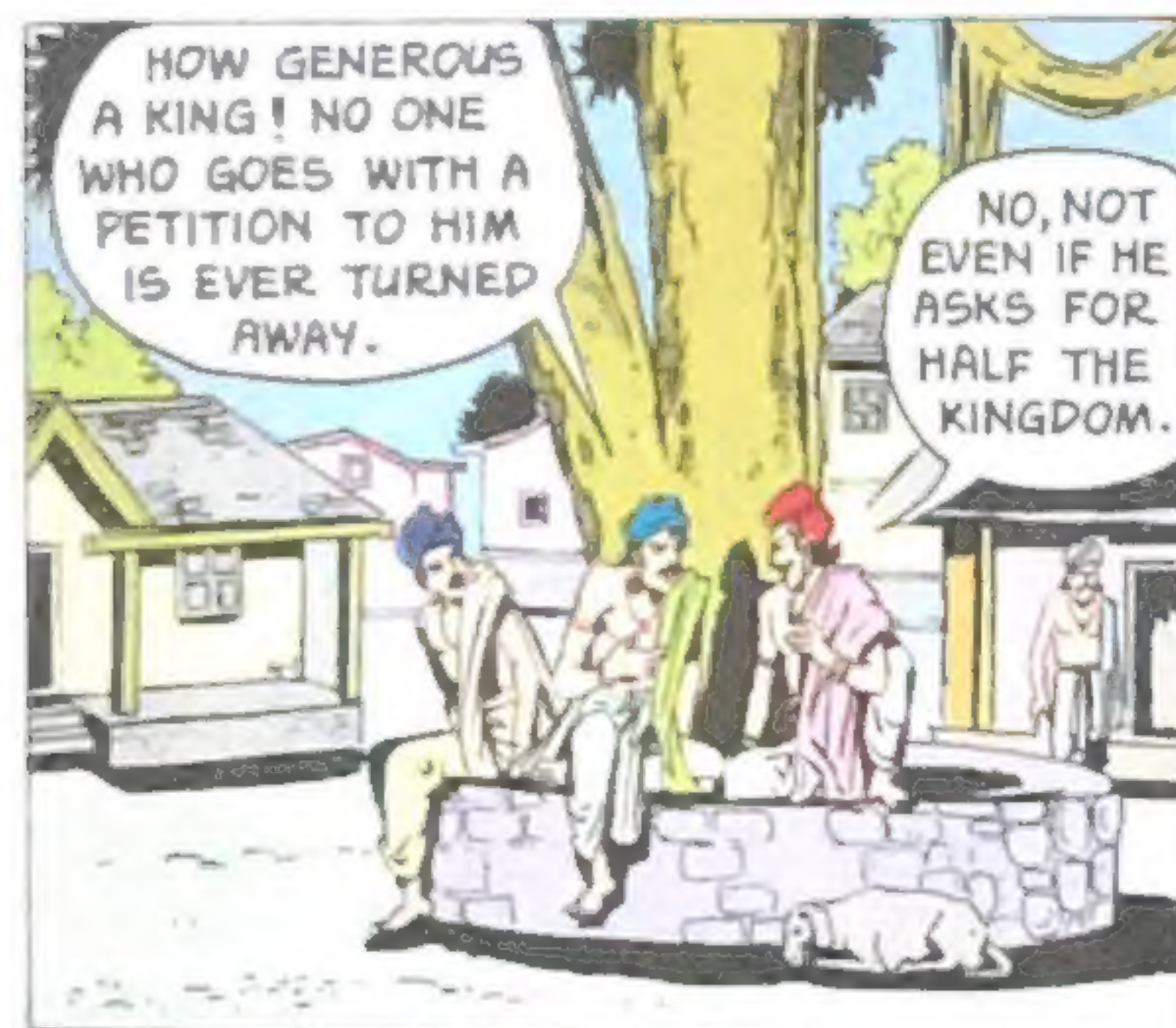
I AM NO LONGER WORRIED, MAHARAJA. BUT I AM SAD.



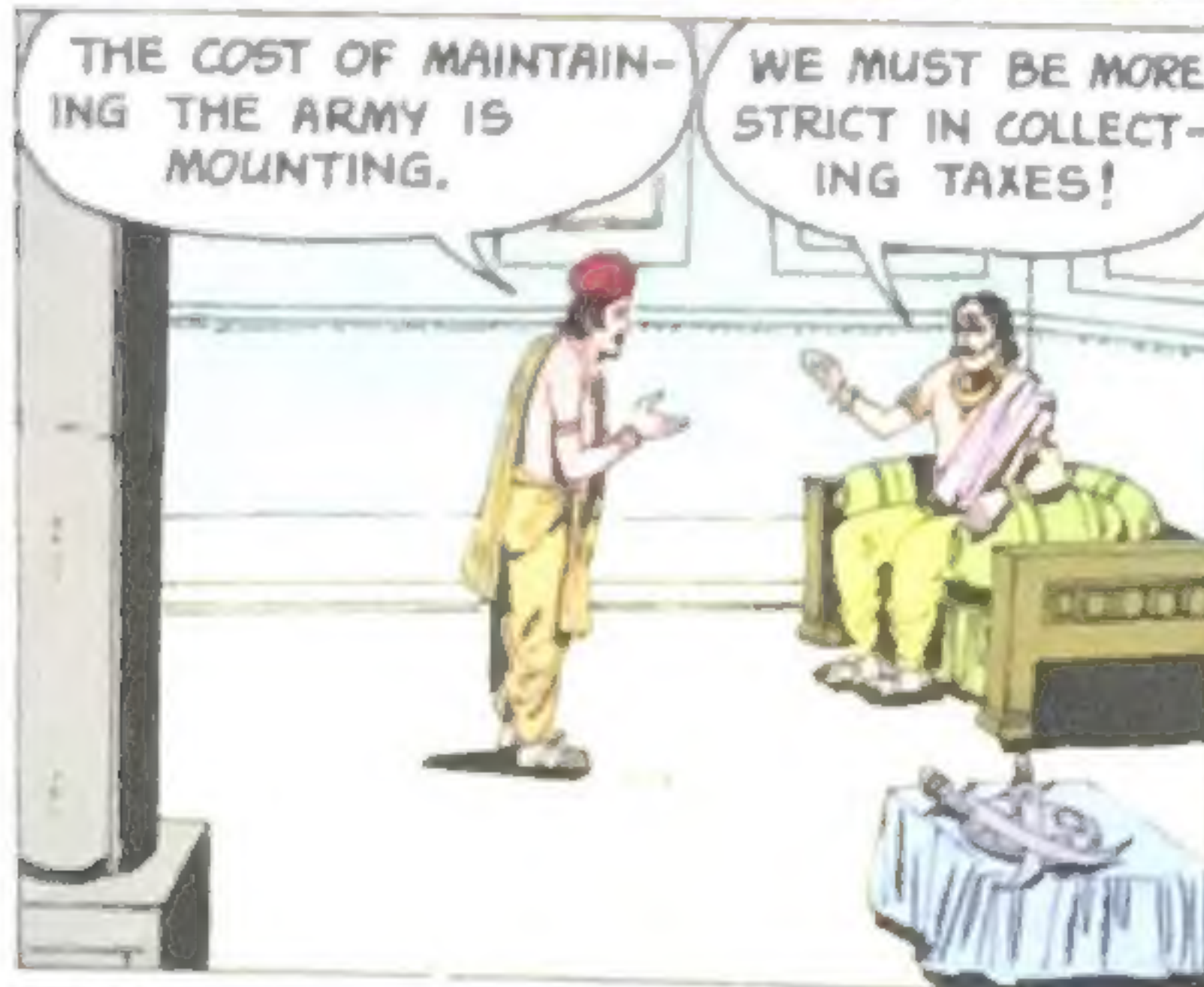
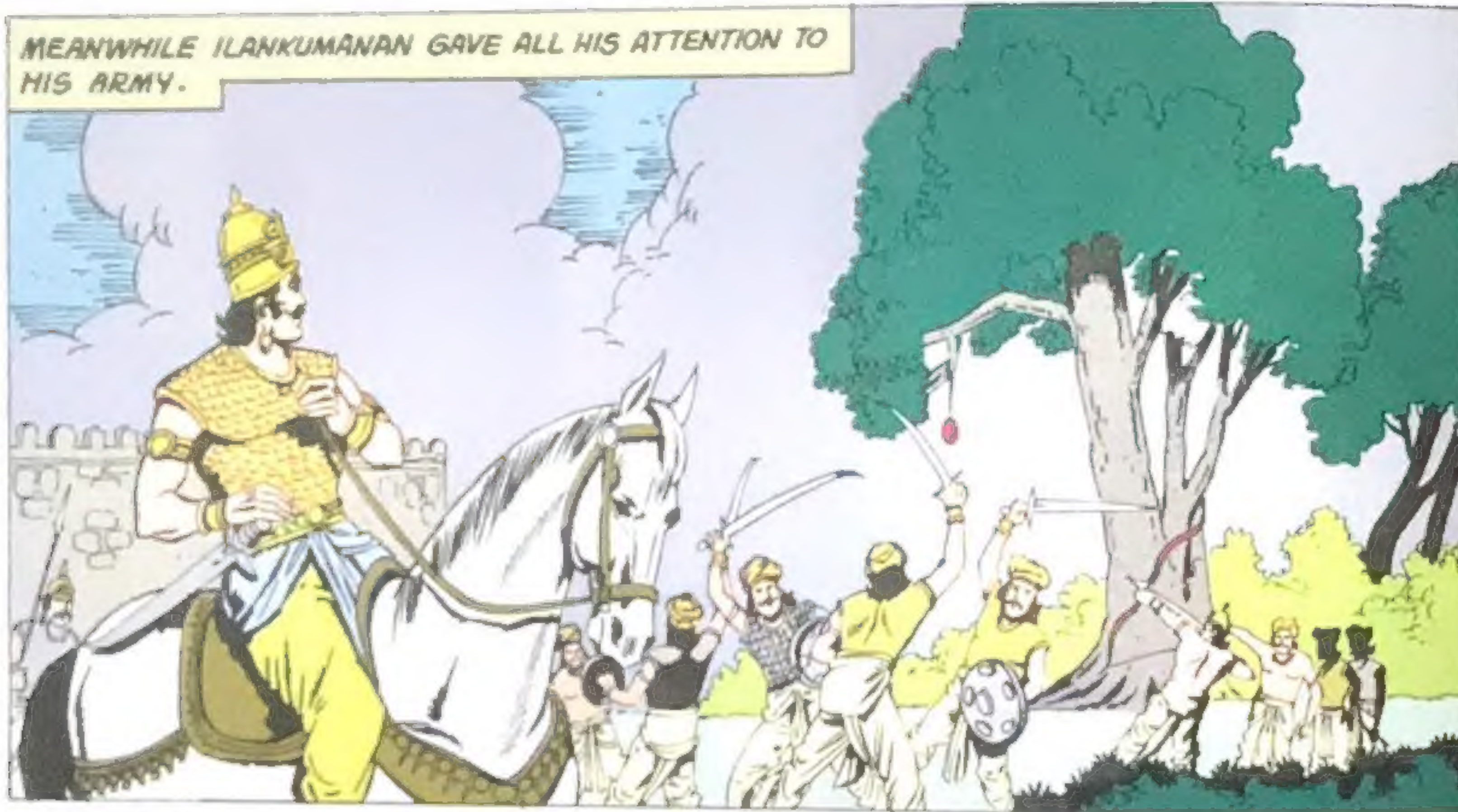


THUS PERUNCHITTIRANAR LEFT, RICHLY REWARDED. BUT KUMANAN WAS BESET BY THE SAME DOUBTS.





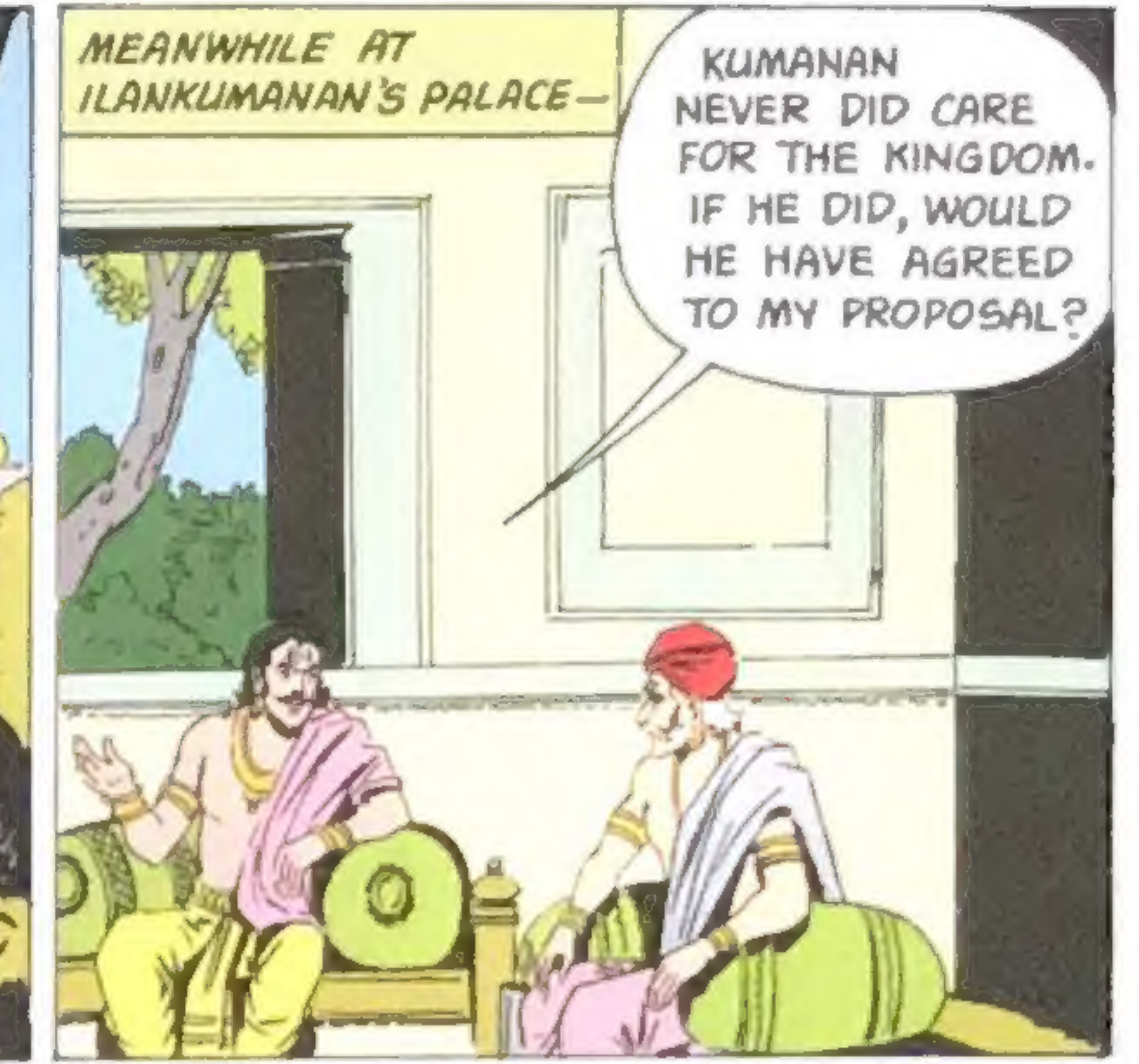
MEANWHILE ILANKUMANAN GAVE ALL HIS ATTENTION TO HIS ARMY.



AND SOON THERE WAS AN EXODUS TO KUMANAN'S TERRITORY.



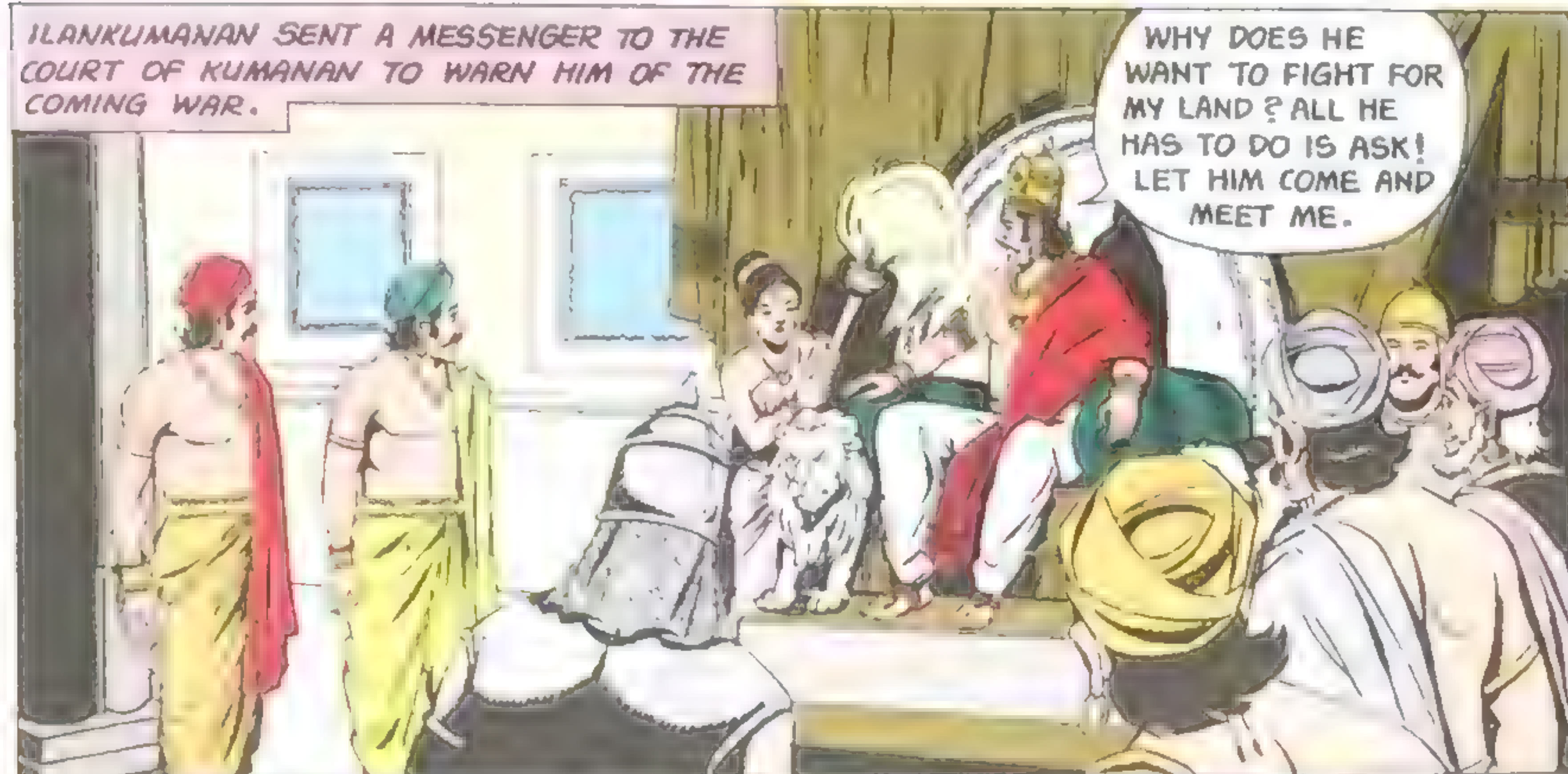
MEANWHILE AT ILANKUMANAN'S PALACE—



THE ARMY WAS ALERTED AND EQUIPPED.



ILANKUMANAN SENT A MESSENGER TO THE COURT OF KUMANAN TO WARN HIM OF THE COMING WAR.



WHY DOES HE WANT TO FIGHT FOR MY LAND? ALL HE HAS TO DO IS ASK! LET HIM COME AND MEET ME.



ARE YOU GOING TO SURRENDER, MAHARAJA? LET IT BE WAR.

BETWEEN BROTHERS? NEVER!

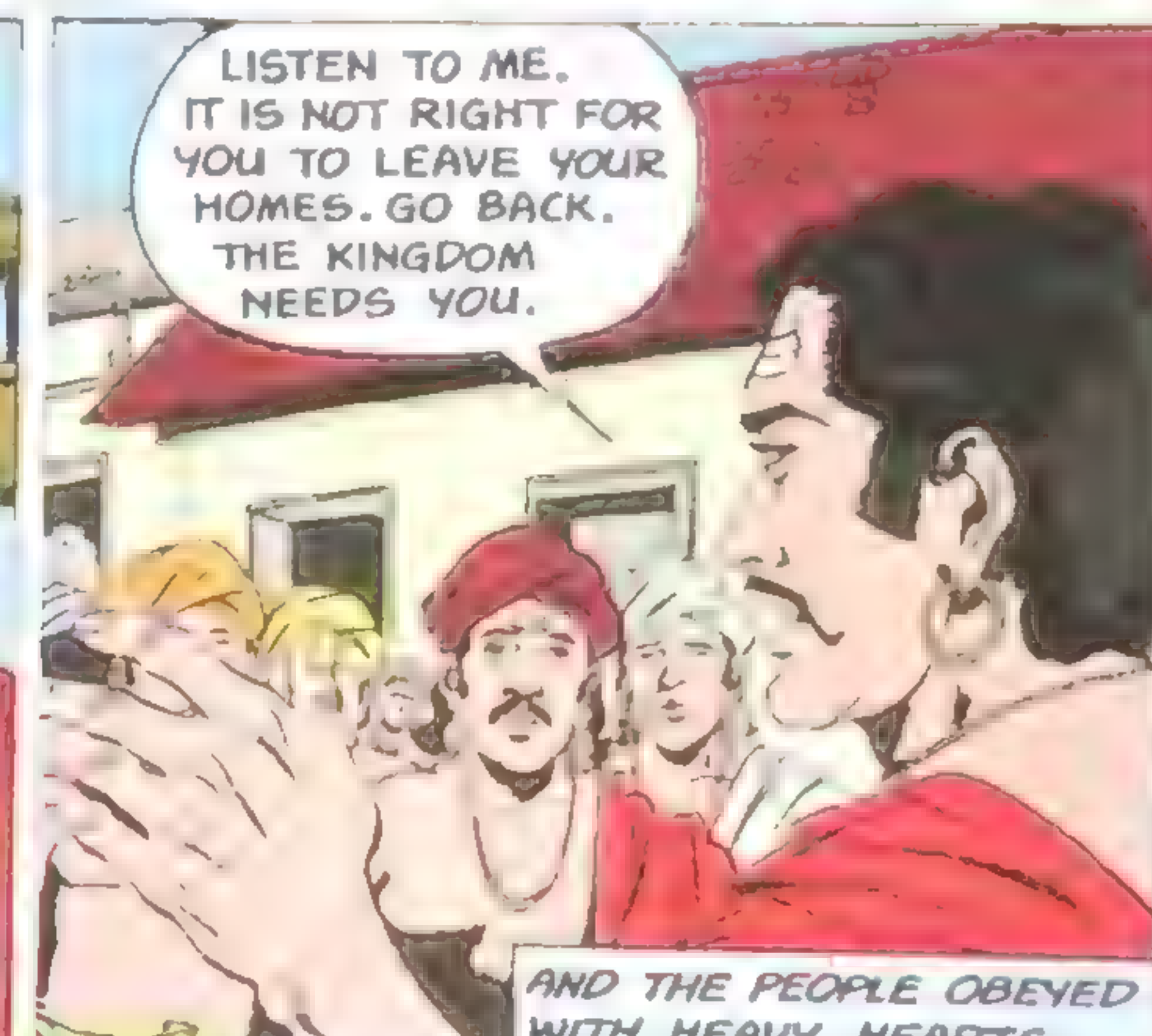


HE IS MY BROTHER. IF HE WANTS THE ENTIRE KINGDOM, HE SHALL HAVE IT.

SO KUMANAN GAVE AWAY EVEN HIS HALF OF THE KINGDOM, BECAUSE HE DID NOT WISH TO FIGHT WITH HIS BROTHER OVER WHAT HE CONSIDERED A TRIFLE.



WE WILL COME WITH YOU, O KING.



LISTEN TO ME. IT IS NOT RIGHT FOR YOU TO LEAVE YOUR HOMES. GO BACK. THE KINGDOM NEEDS YOU.

AND THE PEOPLE OBEYED WITH HEAVY HEARTS.

KUMANAN RETIRED TO A HUMBLE DWELLING IN THE FOREST.



THE GENEROUS KUMANAN NOW LIVED ON THE GENEROSITY OF HIS SUBJECTS!



MEANWHILE, CONDITIONS UNDER ILANKUMANAN'S RULE WENT FROM BAD TO WORSE.

THE KING HAS INCREASED THE TAXES WHEN PEOPLE ARE ALREADY HEAVILY BURDENED.

HE HAS NO SYMPATHY FOR THE SUFFERINGS OF THE POOR!

THE CROPS FAILED AND THERE WAS FAMINE.

THE GODS ARE ANGRY WITH US.

ONLY A GOOD KING ON THE THRONE CAN HAVE GOD'S GRACE.

YES. WE MUST BRING KUMANAN BACK.

THE PEOPLE BEGAN TO PLOT AGAINST THE KING, AT FIRST IN SECRET...

...AND SOON IN THE OPEN.

ON NEW MOON NIGHT, THEN, BEHIND THE PALACE ORCHARD GATE. SPREAD THE WORD.

THE THREATENED PLOT WAS EXPOSED BY THE GUARD WHO SPOTTED THE CONSPIRATORS.

THE CONSPIRATORS KNEW THEY WERE IN DANGER AND FLED AT DEAD OF NIGHT.

THE CRIMINALS HAVE FLED. THE THREAT IS OVER.

NO. IT IS NOT.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

THE REAL THREAT IS KUMANAN. YOU CAN ONLY BE SECURE WHEN KUMANAN IS NO MORE!



THAT EVENING —

HEAR YE! THE KING HAS OFFERED A REWARD OF A HUNDRED THOUSAND PONS FOR KUMANAN'S HEAD!

A HUNDRED THOUSAND CURSES ON THE HEAD OF ILANKUMANAN!

THE ANNOUNCEMENT ONLY MADE MATTERS WORSE, AND THE PEOPLE BECAME EVEN MORE UNHAPPY.

A DELEGATION MET KUMANAN AND EXPLAINED THE SITUATION IN THE LAND.

WE CANNOT TOLERATE THIS ANY MORE.

LET US PERSUADE KUMANAN TO RETURN FOR THE SAKE OF THE PEOPLE.

A HUNDRED THOUSAND PONS FOR THIS HEAD! RATHER OVER-PRICED, ISN'T IT?

THIS IS NO TIME FOR JOKES, MAHA-RAJA. YOU MUST RETURN. THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE NEED YOU. YOU MUST NOT FAIL THEM.

THE CITIZENS WENT AWAY WITH HEAVY HEARTS.

IF ONLY KUMANAN HAD AGREED!

THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE HAVE A KING ALREADY! BESIDES I WILL NOT TAKE BACK WHAT I HAVE GIVEN AWAY. I CANNOT RETURN.

A FEW DAYS LATER KUMANAN HAD ANOTHER VISITOR — POET PERUNTHALAICHATTANAR.

THE GOOD KING BANISHED TO THE FOREST, AND THE YOUNGER BROTHER ON THE THRONE. THIS IS NOT FAIR!

BUT NOW I CAN DEVOTE MYSELF ENTIRELY TO MATTERS I VALUE. I CAN NOW ENJOY YOUR COMPANY UNHINDERED. DO BEGIN.

THE POET SANG AND KUMANAN LISTENED, ENTHRALLED.

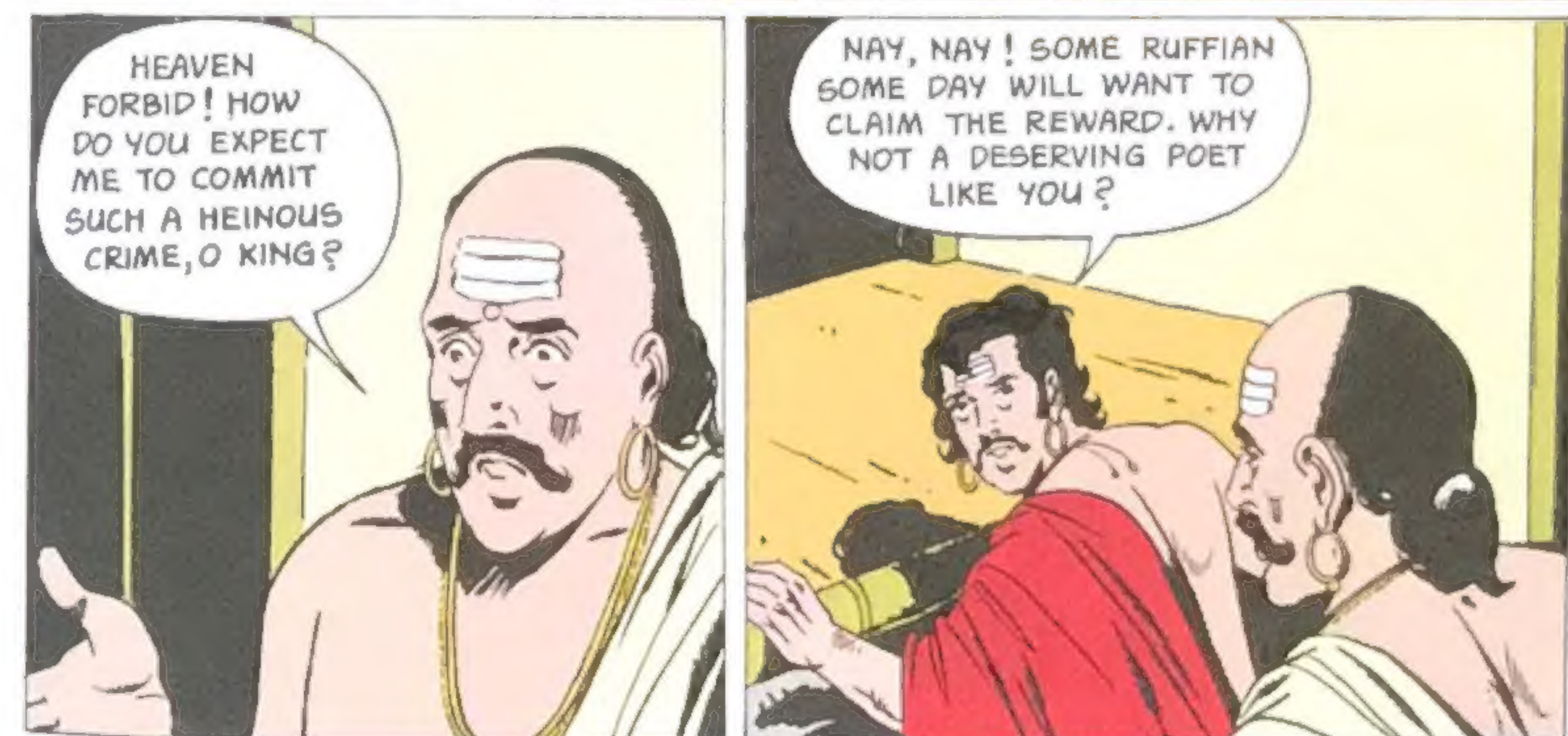
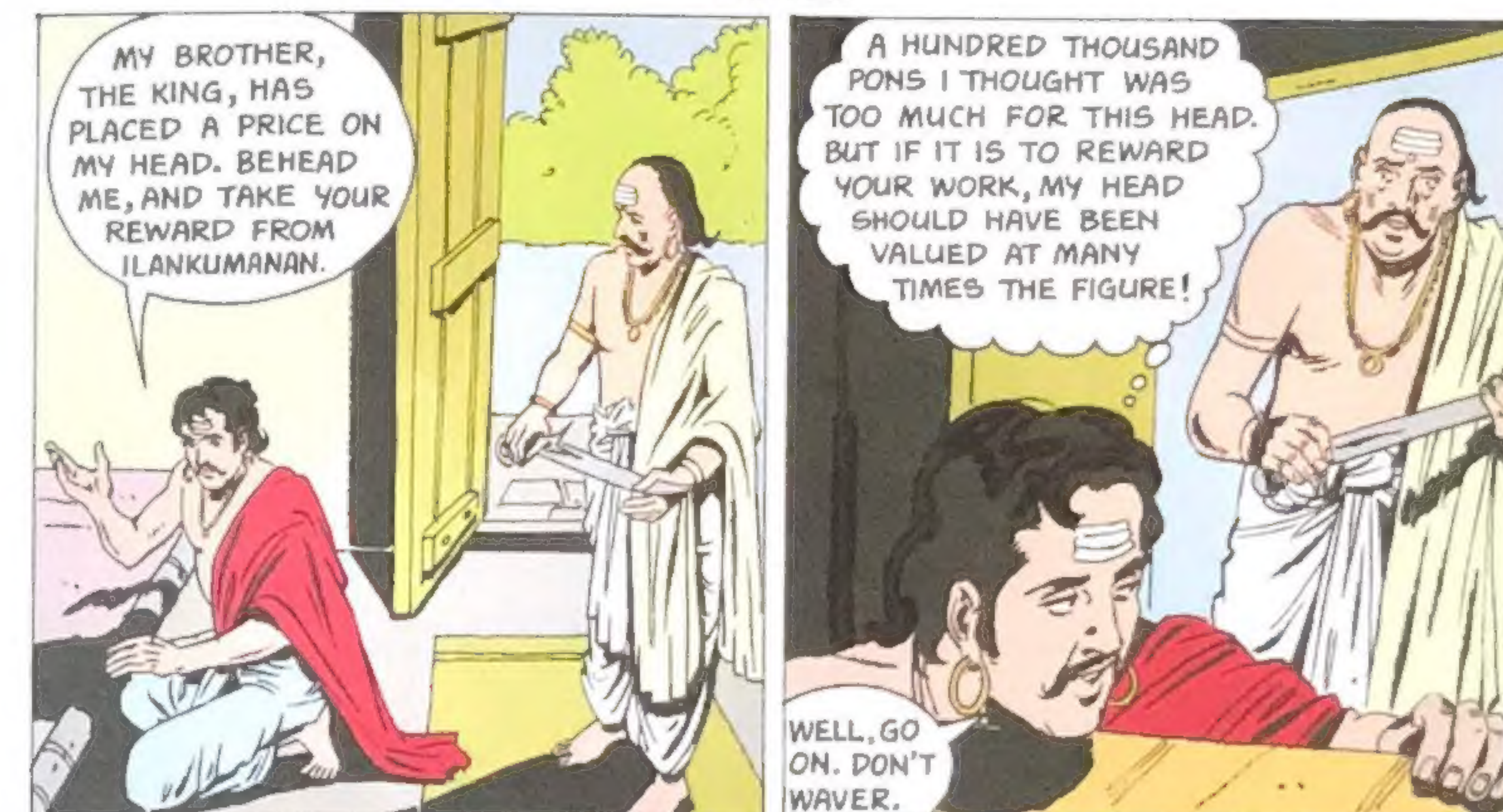
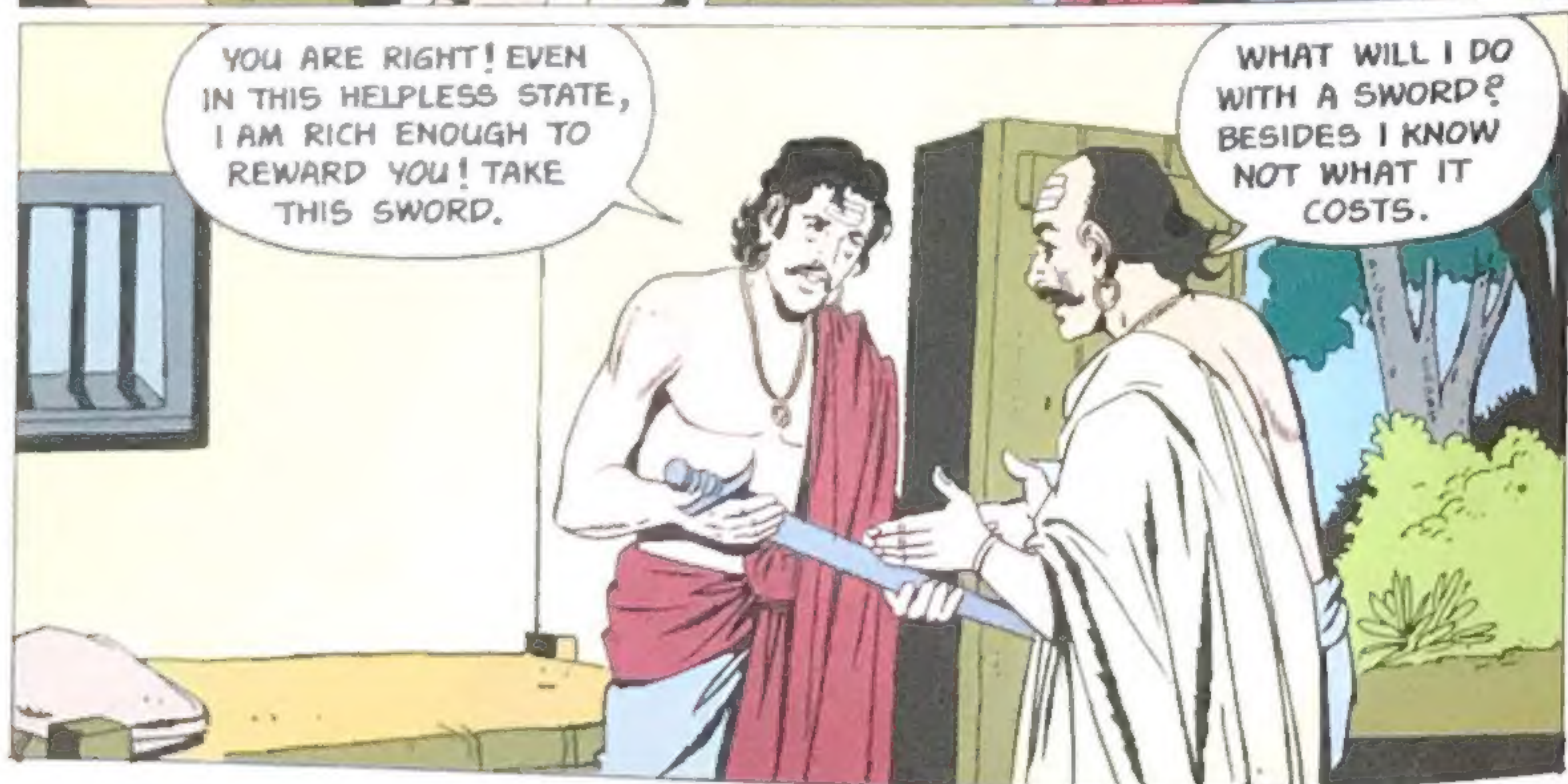
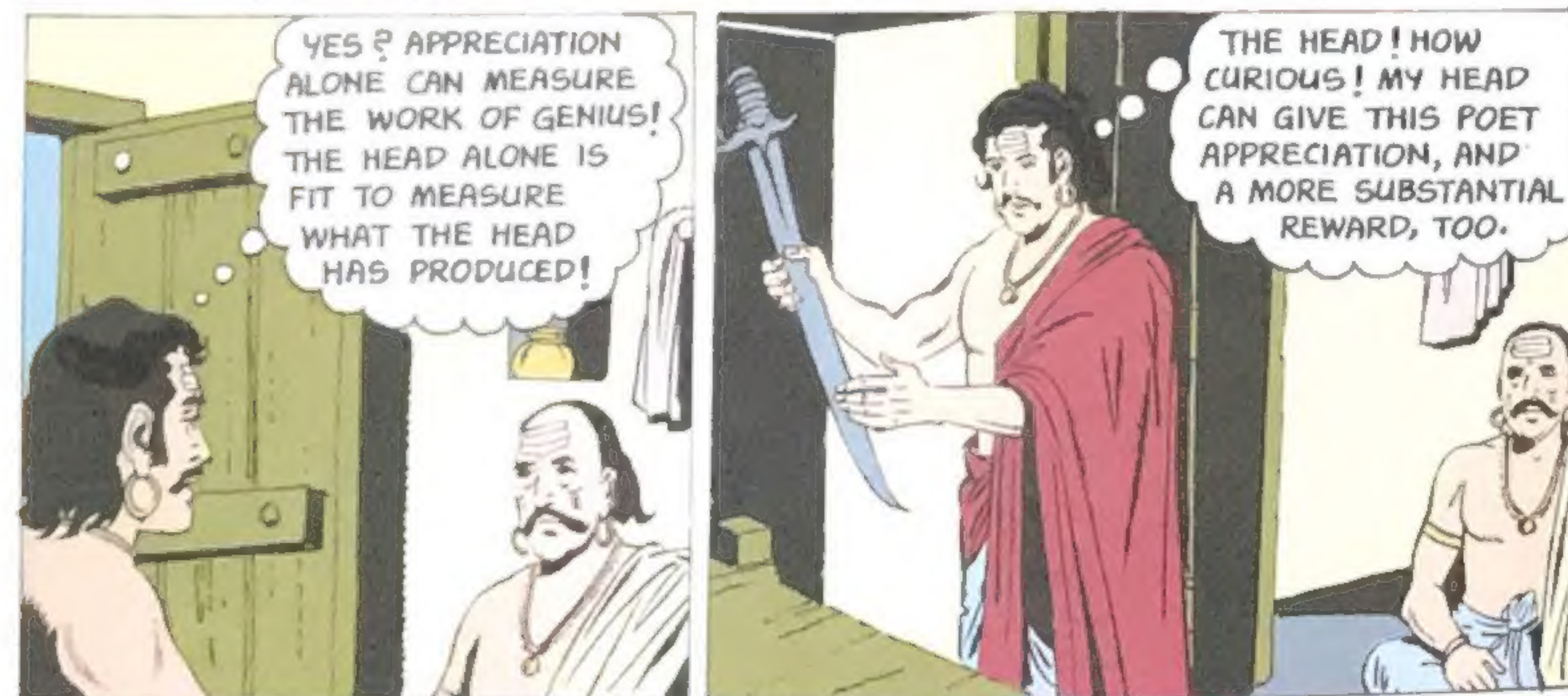
FINALLY —

AH! HOW EXQUISITELY BEAUTIFUL! I FEEL A LITTLE SAD AT YOUR SONG, BUT IT IS STRANGELY SWEET AND STIMULATING.

YOU, O KING, ARE THE KING OF CON-NOISSEURS TOO.

HOW I WISH YOU HAD COME EARLIER WHEN I COULD HAVE SENT YOU BACK WITH YOUR HANDS FULL OF GIFTS YOU SO RICHLY DESERVE!

THE WATERS OF THE RIVER DRY UP ON THE SURFACE BUT PERENNIAL SPRINGS RUN DEEP BELOW. POOR THOUGH YOU BE, YOU ARE NOT SO HELPLESS THAT A REWARD YOU CANNOT BESTOW!



MEANWHILE, ILANKUMANAN HAD SECOND THOUGHTS.

NOTHING SEEMS TO WORK. THE KINGDOM IS FACING RUIN. PEOPLE BLAME ME AND CURSE ME FOR IT.

I WILL CHANGE MY ORDER! KUMANAN SHOULD LIVE!



YOUR WISH IS FULFILLED, MAHARAJA!



HERE IS THE HEAD.



THE HEAD OF KUMANAN!

NO! IT CANNOT BE! MY BROTHER DEAD! THIS IS A BLACK DAY!

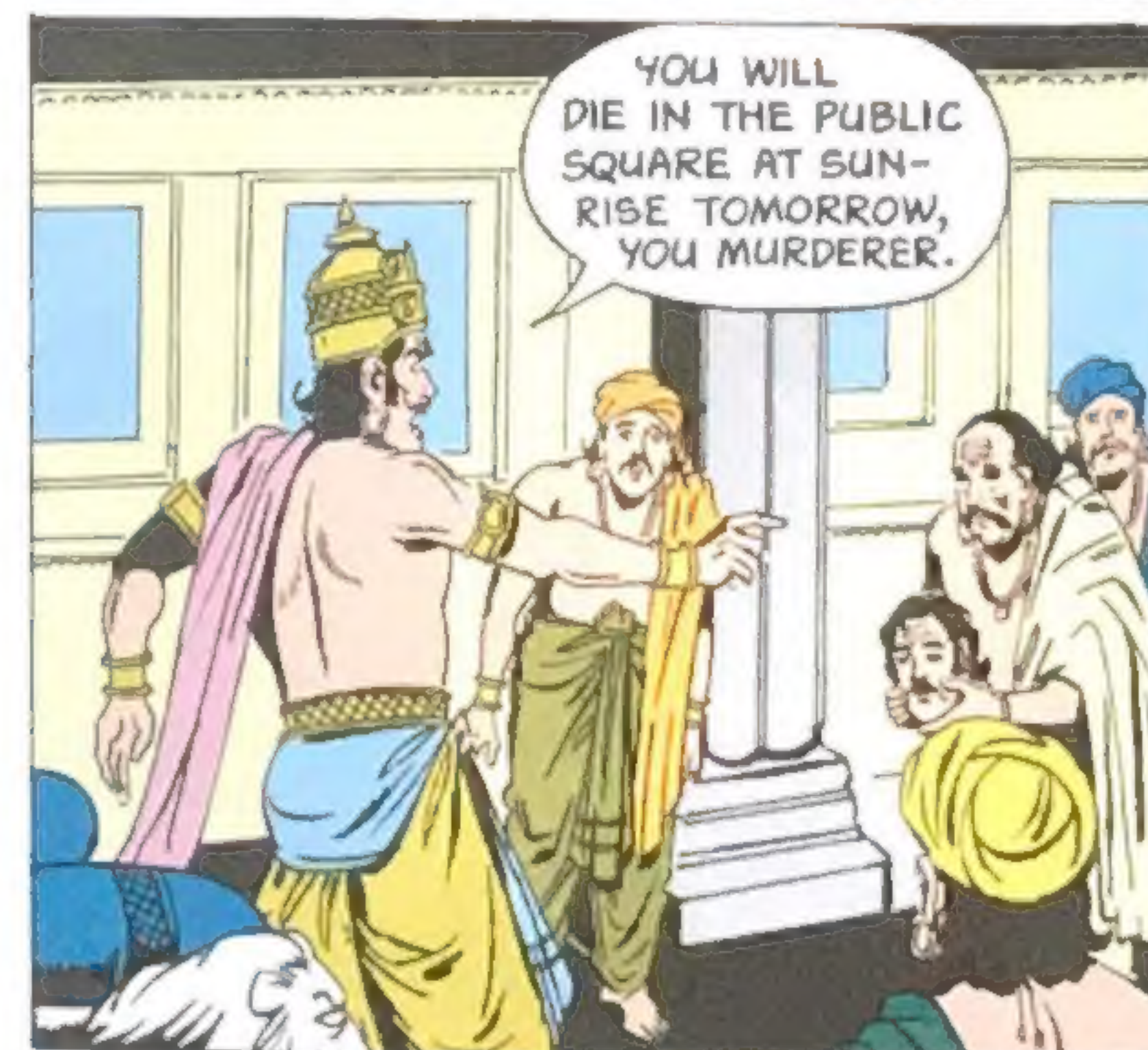


YOU, COMMON MURDERER...

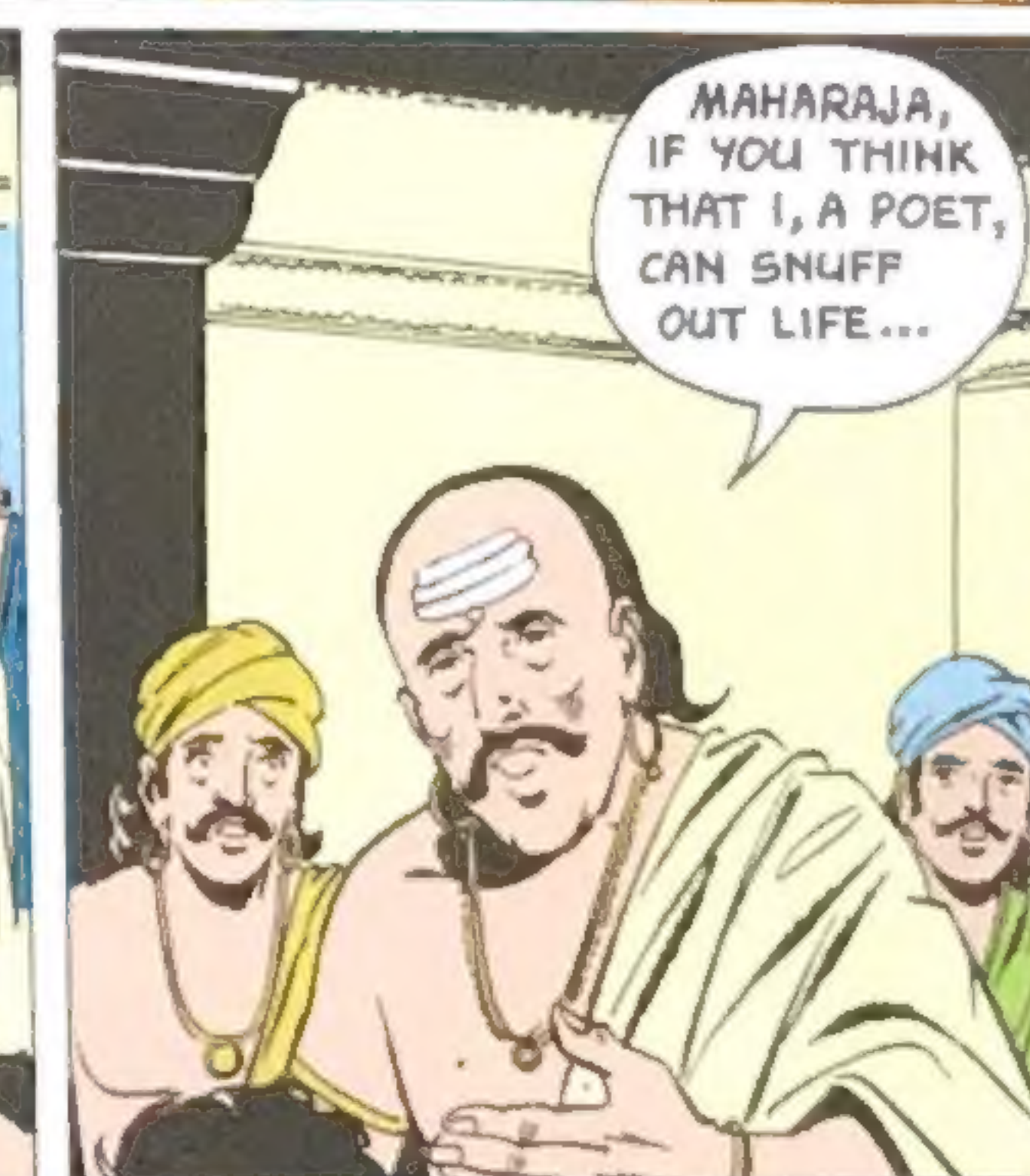


BUT MAHARAJA, YOU PROCLAIMED...

IT WAS DONE IN A FIT OF RAGE. BUT YOU...



YOU WILL DIE IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE AT SUN-RISE TOMORROW, YOU MURDERER.



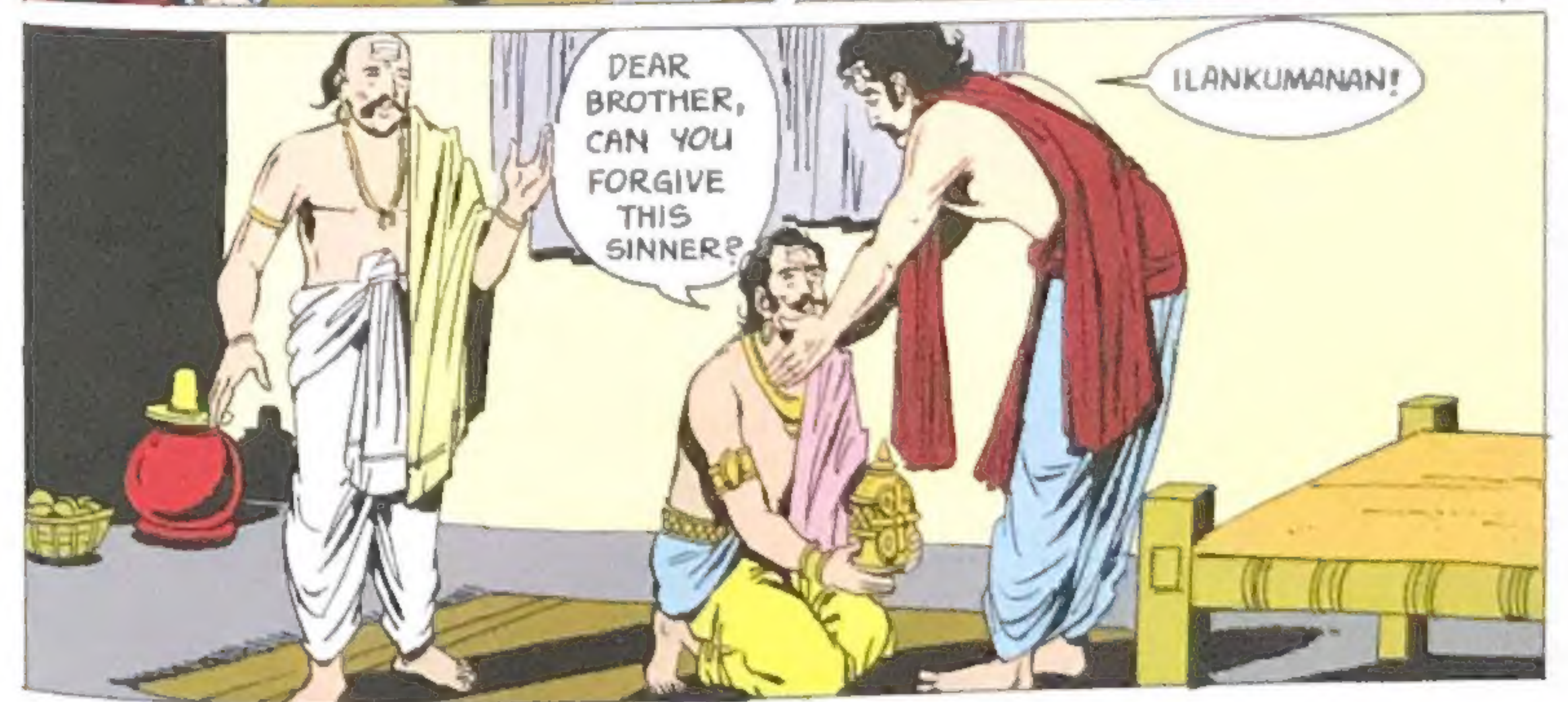
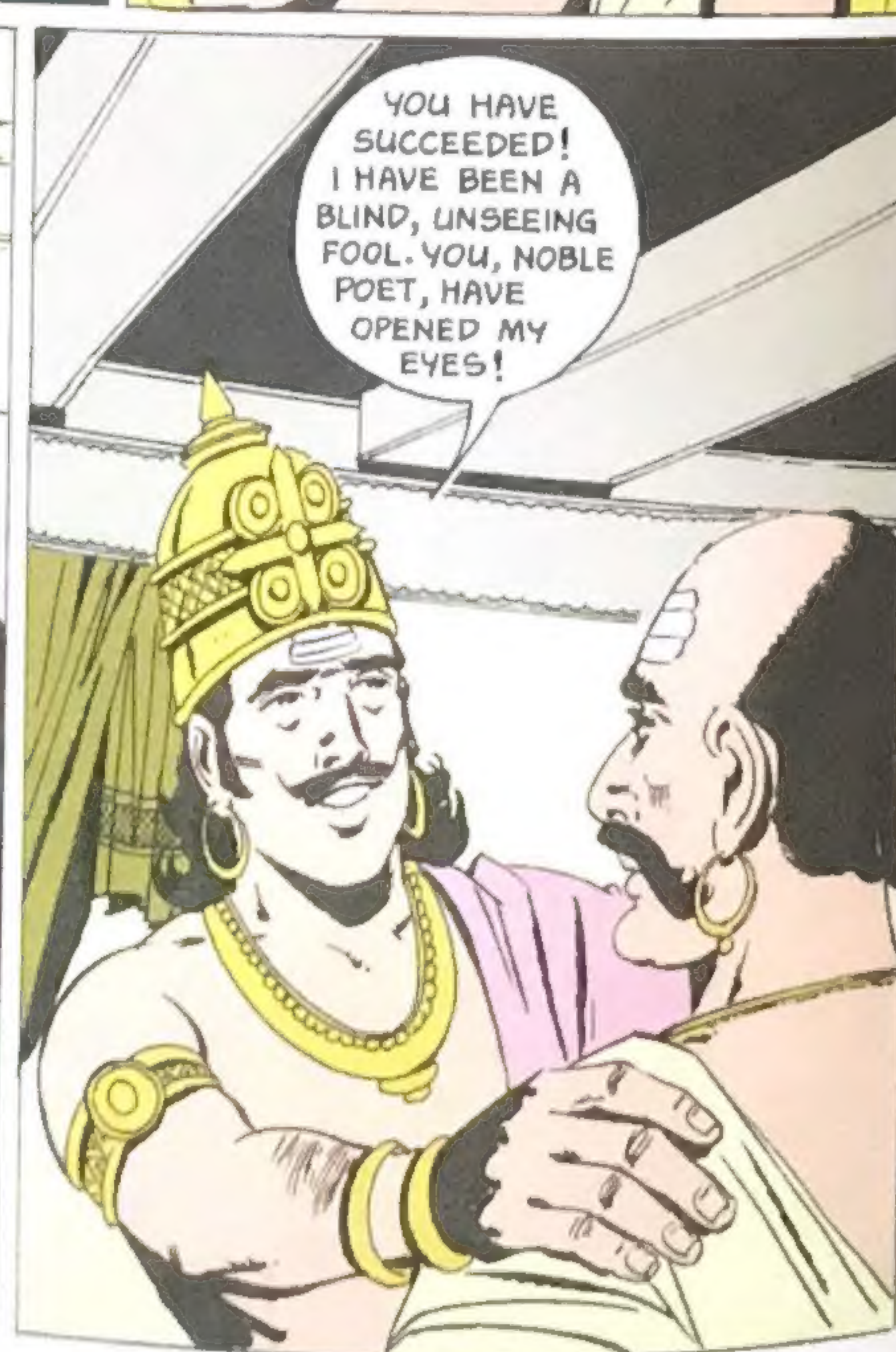
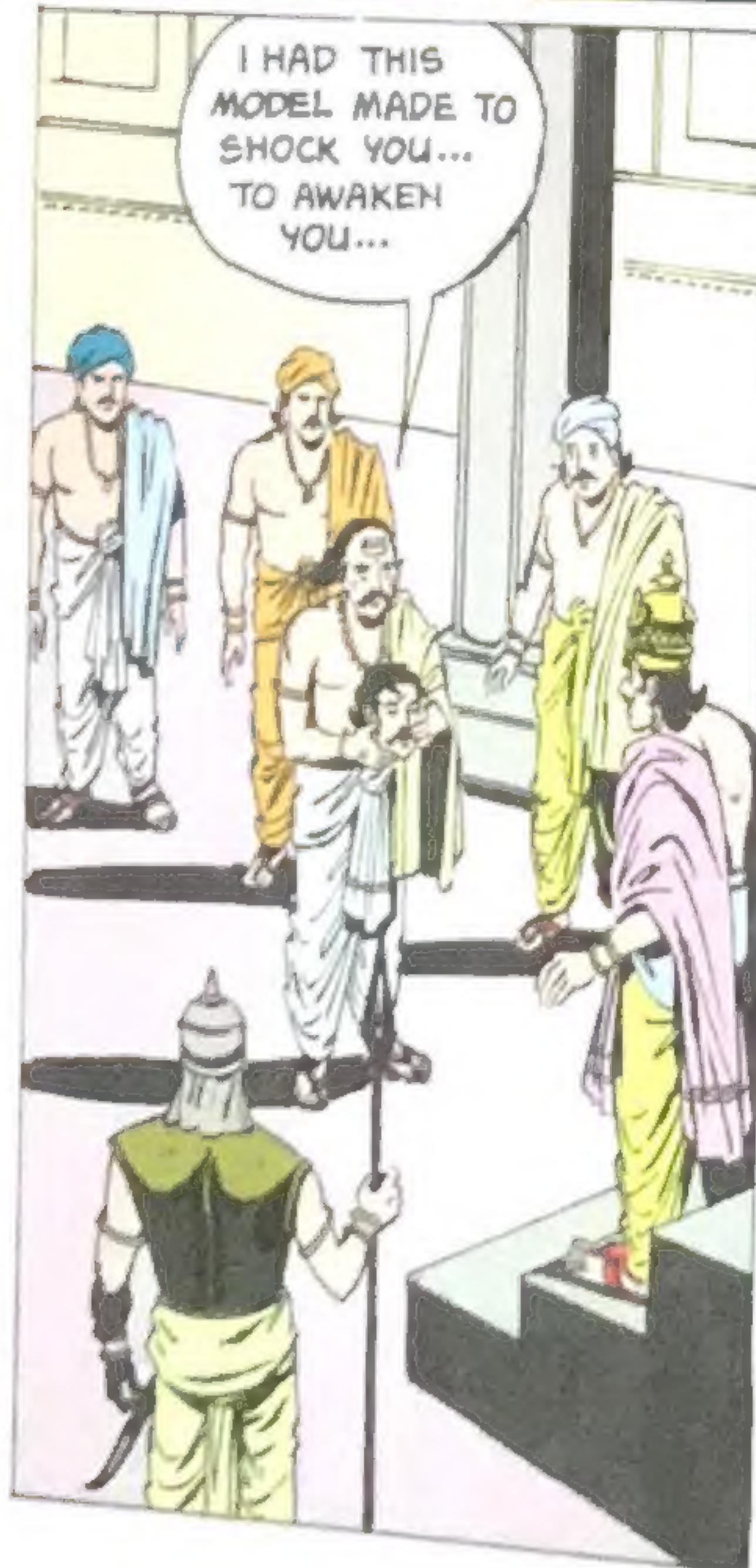
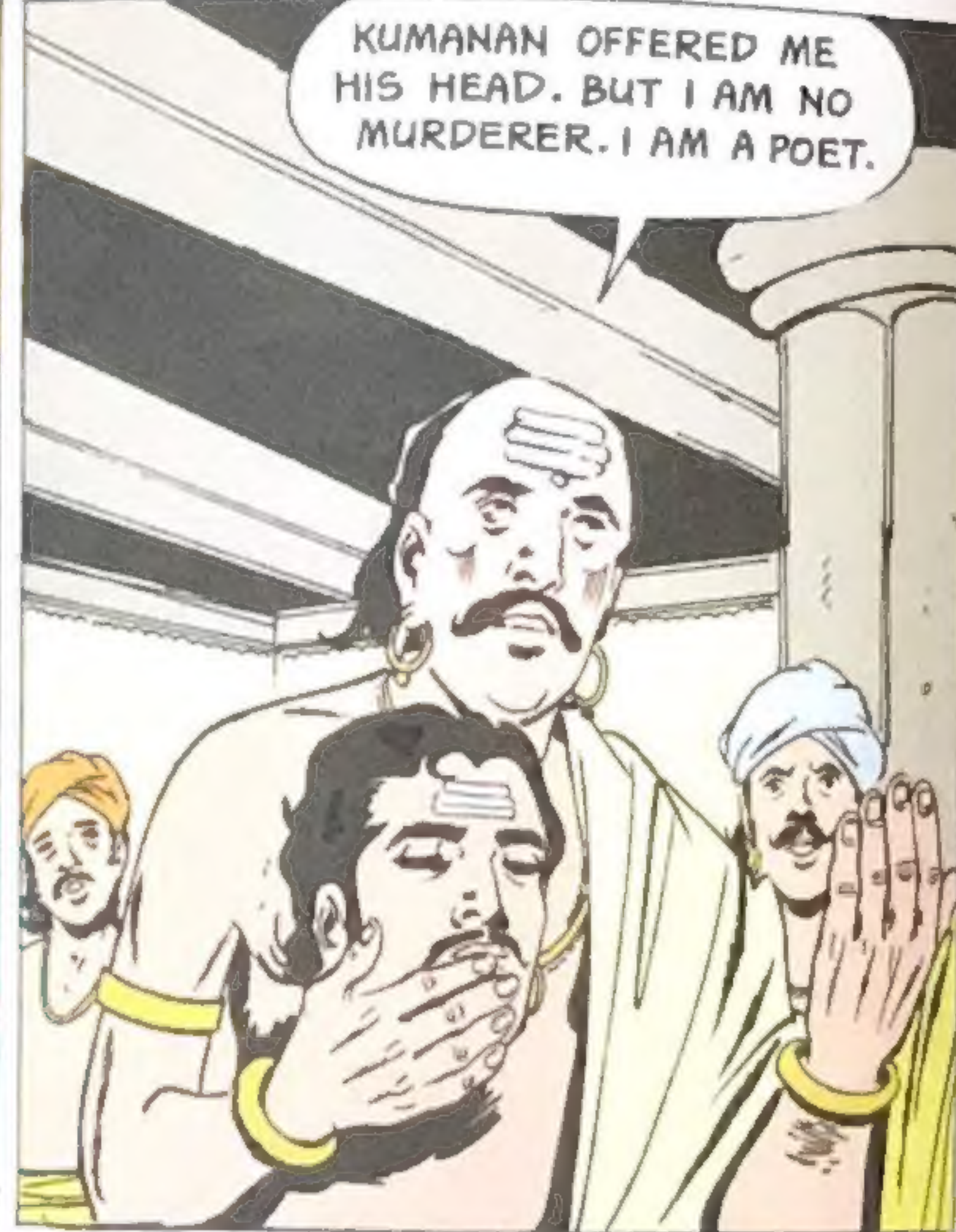
MAHARAJA, IF YOU THINK THAT I, A POET, CAN SNUFF OUT LIFE...

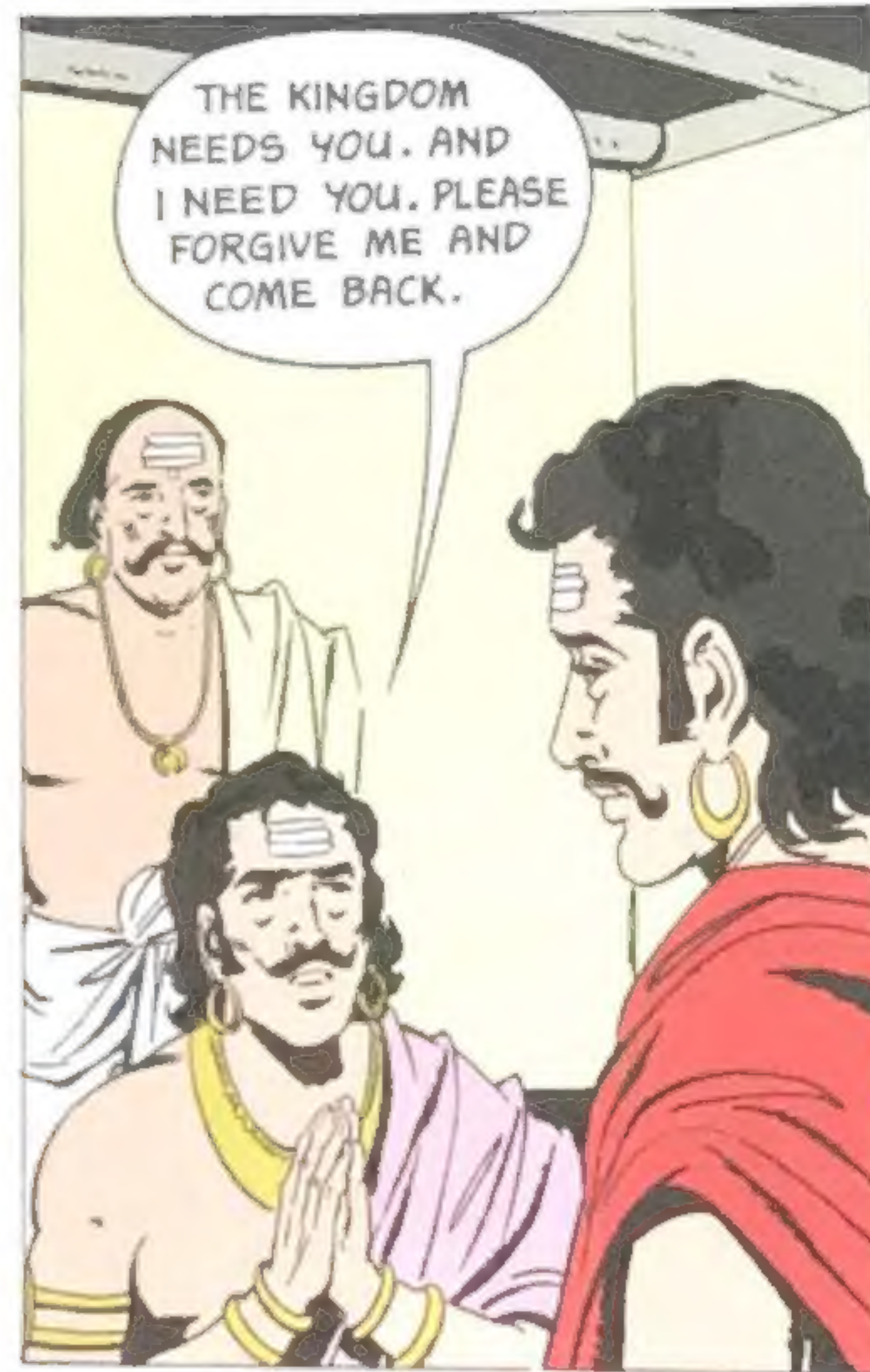


...YOU CAN AS WELL PRESUME THAT I CAN REKINDLE IT.



IS IT POSSIBLE? IF SO I WILL GIVE YOU DOUBLE THE REWARD.

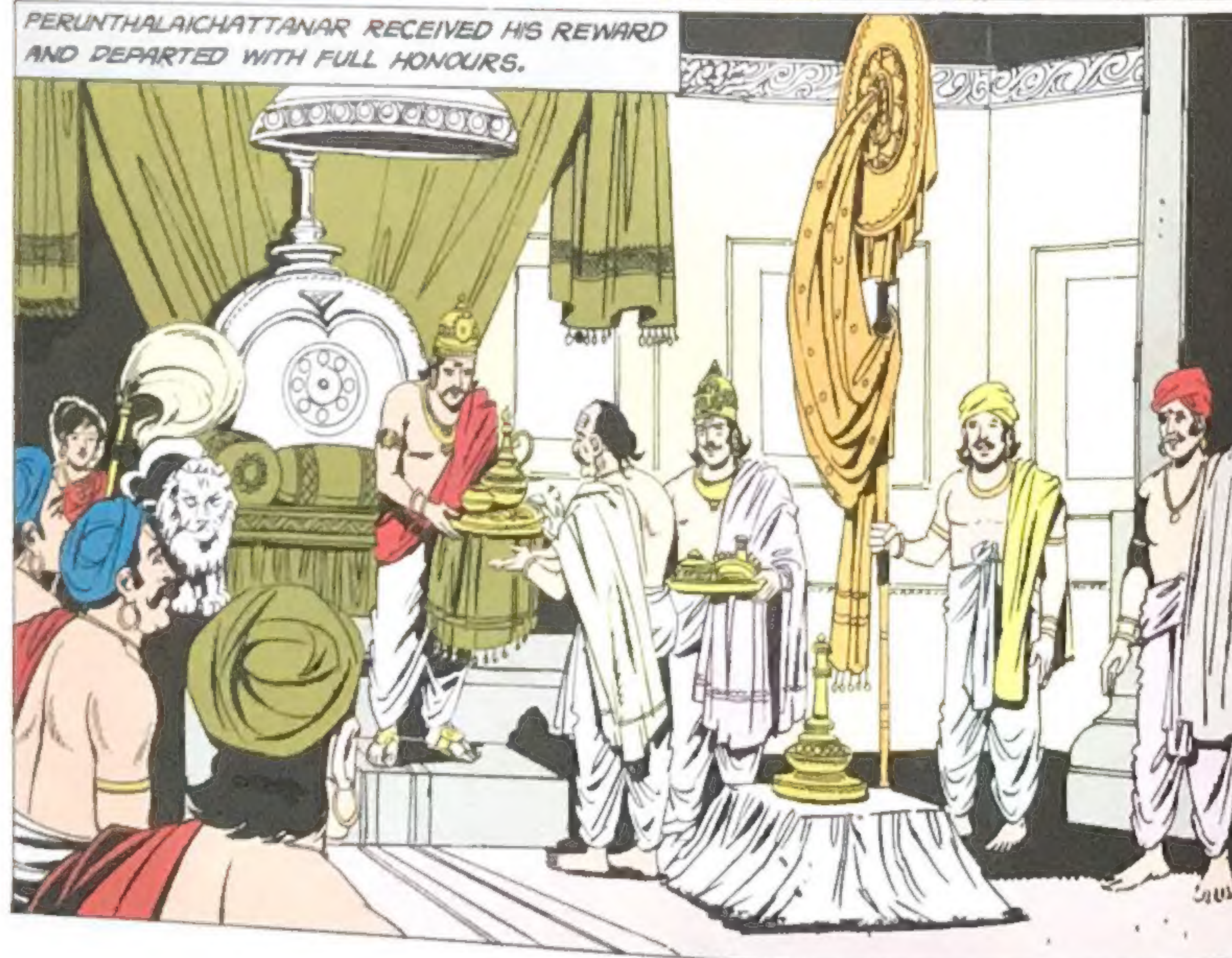




KUMANAN AGREED TO RETURN TO THE CAPITAL.



PERUNTHALAICHATTANAR RECEIVED HIS REWARD AND DEPARTED WITH FULL HONOURS.



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